

**THE EVOLUTION OF MAX
REGER'S PIANO WORKS
UNEARTHED: ASPECTS OF
HARMONY, COUNTERPOINT,
AND TEXTURE**

BY

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Chapter One: Introduction

Johann Baptist Joseph Maximilian Reger (19 March, 1873-11 May, 1916) was a German Romantic composer who stood at the crossroads between the deluge of Romanticism and the ensuing emergence of Modernism. On the one hand, representative composers of the Romantic era such as Mendelssohn, Schumann, Chopin, Brahms, and Liszt have shaped the stylistic tendencies of the 19th century; on the other hand, a new concept of sound pioneered by the French Impressionists coupled with the ground-breaking innovations of the Second Viennese School threatened to steer the development of music in a radically different direction. Max Reger was born into this stylistically conflicting period, which inevitably left their marks in many of his compositions. His commendable output for the piano throughout his lifetime serves as the ideal gateway for us to afford a glimpse into his creative world, which surprisingly, has produced relatively little research and scholarship in countries outside Germany. It is for this reason that I have endeavored to embark on a journey to survey his piano works to gain a better understanding of the man and his music.

Max Reger was born in a small town of Brand in North Bavaria. His father, Joseph Reger, was a music enthusiast who wrote a book on harmony, and even put together a “house-organ” for him and his son to use. Under the musical influence of his father, the young Max began taking piano lessons at the age of five from his mother, Philomena. As a boy, he showed a prodigious talent for mathematics, which to no surprise, contributed significantly to his remarkable mastery of counterpoint later on in his life. Reger had two important teachers in his life: Adalbert Lindner and Hugo Riemann. Lindner was an organist and teacher in Weiden. Under the tutelage of Lindner, Reger was immersed in the piano literature from J. S. Bach to Brahms. At the same time, he became intensely interested in the organ and also began to focus his energy on the study of harmony and counterpoint. Riemann was his next teacher at the Conservatory in Sonderhausen, who was an authoritative musical figure in Germany and made

formidable contributions especially in the field of music theory. Among his most enduring publications was *Musik-Lexikon*, a work that deals primarily with the analysis of the works of Bach, Beethoven and Brahms. As we will soon discover, Riemann's teachings had a lasting impact in the piano works of Reger, though later on in his life, Reger did liberate himself from the restrictions and conventions put forth by his teacher. His studies with Riemann marked the beginning of his rise to fame as a composer, where Busoni even hailed him in 1905 as "the greatest living and deeply German composer"¹ at the time. However, his fame and reputation was also often met with strong oppositions. The decision of Reger and his family to move to Munich in 1901 consequently thrust him into the hotbed of the New German School, to whose musical ideals he had many direct and even fierce clashes. It is worth mentioning that Reger was a fine pianist in his days, especially with respect to his dynamic flexibility and his ability to color the sound. As Hermann Poppen described: "each large crescendo was taken by storm with a forward-surging tempo, each subsiding diminuendo calmed the pace again"². This quote seems to indicate that his playing embodied a great sense of freedom. Reger held several important posts throughout his life: first as *Universitaetsmusikdirektor* and accepted the position as a theory teacher at the Conservatory of Leipzig; in 1911, he took up appointment as the *Hofkapellmeister* in Meiningen under the sponsorship of Duke Georg. It was then he had numerous opportunities to promote many of his compositions. In addition to these two positions he held, Reger maintained an exhausting touring schedule, and performed as many as 106 concerts between 1912 and 1913. It was also around this time when he began to display signs of decline in his health due to over-exertion and excessive alcohol consumption, leading to his untimely death on May 11th, 1916 at the age of 43. Lying beside his deathbed was the text to his 8 Spiritual Songs of Op. 134, which read "Man lives and exists only a short time"³

¹ Helmet Brauss, Max Reger's Music for Solo Piano (The University of Alberta Press, 1994) 12.

² Brauss 13.

³ Brauss 20.

Much in the same way as Beethoven, Reger was well aware of his capabilities as a composer and knew he had a mission to fulfill: to defend the cause of absolute music against the overwhelming dominance of program music, putting him in a similar camp as Brahms and Joachim, who reacted against the music of Liszt and Wagner. Unlike Brahms, who viewed his own works with the utmost criticism; Reger was rather careless by comparison. His blessing of being able to compose with such ease perhaps proved to be his biggest enemy—he had no problems producing a wealth of pieces for many hungry publishers who were demanding them to be released to the public immediately. As he himself admitted, he regretted not putting enough care and attention into his compositional craft, especially in his earlier pieces. At other times, pieces were written in haste with a lack of inner motivation, except to comply with the demands of the publishers. These resulted in a very unbalanced quality of his overall output, especially in his piano works. For the aforementioned reasons, it is perhaps not as surprising that contemporaries of Max Reger were often dismissive of his works. His pieces tend to be judged rather than explored even in subsequent generations. Notable composers have voiced their disdain for his music. Gustav Mahler’s biographer Richard Specht noted at the reaction of the composer to the music of Reger: “...He found Reger’s gothic airs and graces deeply repulsive”⁴. So bitter and acrimonious was Stravinsky’s remarks: “I also remember having met Max Reger during these years...I found him personally as repulsive as his music”⁵. However, other composers have ardently given credit to his skills. Schoenberg once claimed “I consider Reger a genius”⁶; Richard Strauss was also unashamed for voicing his admiration “I do not have your facility and reliable command of compositional technique”⁷. The polarity of opinions formed by

⁴ Rheinhold Brinkmann, Antonius Bittmann, A “Last Giant in Music”: Thoughts on Max Reger in the Twentieth Century (The Musical Quarterly, Vol. 87, No. 4: 2004) 635.

⁵ Brinkmann, Bittmann 635.

⁶ Brinkmann, Bittmann 635.

⁷ Brinkmann, Bittmann 635.

other composers of his generation seems to have been mirrored in the overall fluctuating quality of his piano pieces.

At the time of his death, Reger left us an unusually large repertoire of piano works, including 21 complete works with opus numbers. Many of them are character pieces in A-B-A form, with section B providing contrast to the outer A sections. A handful of other pieces use conventional forms of the past; these include the *Sonatinas*, Preludes and Fugues, and Variations. On the whole, these pieces have remained in obscurity far from the common repertoire of concert pianists. Because there is a general lack of understanding for the piano music of Max Reger, it is my hope that through this research paper I could shed some new light and perspective in this largely unexplored area. Select works from his early, middle and late periods will be examined from the aspects of harmony, counterpoint, and texture. Observations will be made for each of these aspects, upon which conclusions will be drawn to determine if the apparent changes in each respective area between periods have a general pattern of development or trajectory. For the purpose of this study, the early “Weiden” period includes all the works written during his life in Weiden and Wiesbaden up to the year 1900, except Op. 44, 45, and 53. The middle period, otherwise known as the “Wild Munich” Period, spans until 1907 up to and including Op. 89. The third and final “Free Jena” Period ends in 1916 and encompasses the rest of the piano opuses. Due to the enormity of his compositions for the piano, certain works have been selected for closer analysis and examination with respect to harmony, counterpoint, and texture; while others receive only superficial observations. We shall begin with a general discussion about Reger’s harmonic language; proceeding next to how his unique uses of harmonies manifest itself in his piano music.

Chapter Two: Harmony

General Characteristics

As noted in the previous paragraphs, Hugo Riemann's teachings left a considerable mark on Reger, especially with respects to his harmonic language as evidenced by scholars and his pupils alike. In particular, Fritz Stein, a famous Reger biographer remarked that it was Reger's intention to take Riemann's theories as a basis to expand them in order to explore new harmonic possibilities⁸. Reger soon perceived Riemann's system to be rather restrictive and therefore broke free from it in search for his own harmonic vocabulary. To this he formulated his five laws, many of which are readily evidenced in his music: 1) All harmonic movements are related to the I, IV, and V triads; 2) When a third-relationship is present between the roots of any of these chords, any chord or two-note chord can function as a I, IV, or V; 3) The primary triad can be extended/altere d to serve secondary dominant functions without modulating; 4) In principle, any chord can precede or follow any chord without any harmonic preparation; 5) The concept of enharmonic, especially when it applies to the different spellings of the diminished seventh chord, which serve to bring distant keys within reach of the primary tonal center⁹. He claimed that even the most outrageous chords are nothing more than a "mental intensification" of the basic primary harmonies of tonic, subdominant, and dominant chords¹⁰. According to Siegfried Mauser, Reger's use of harmonies can be distilled down to two primary uses. Firstly, the use of chromatic harmony as a color device. Since the root meaning of *chroma* is color, he takes full advantage of it in many of his compositions. Chromatic harmony also serves as the vital connective agent to distant keys in a seamless manner. The use of chromatic harmony is also often tied to his motivic variation technique: he frequently uses chromaticism imaginatively to decorate passages derived

⁸ Gerd Sievers, *Die Harmonik im Werk Max Regers* (Breitkopf & Haertel, Wiesbaden: 1974) 56.

⁹ Jamesetta V. Holliman, *A Stylistic Study of Max Reger's Solo Piano Variations and Fugues on Themes by J. S. Bach and George Philipp Telemann* (New York University, 1975) 52.

¹⁰ Sievers 71.

from the same motivic idea, as opposed to the mechanical use of sequential passages whereby harmonies are simply replicated. Secondly, harmony is used as a tool for characterization: as evidenced in the *Humoreske* Op. 20 or the *Burlesken* of Op. 58. In these instances, not only do these titles point to an inherent “scherzo-like” character, part of the humor lies perhaps in the quick chromatic turns of harmonies which thwarts our expectations¹¹. Notwithstanding his general penchant for a chromatically based harmonic language, Reger’s use of harmonies at important cadential points and between phrases may illuminate why the legacy of Riemann was significant. Reger often reduces the chromatic thickness in order to prepare for the cadence. More often the not, the sudden emergence of a diatonic cadence comes across as refreshing and surprisingly beautiful within a largely chromatic framework¹². In Mauser’s opinion, the closest musical equivalent to Reger’s music was probably those of Wagner’s. Both men worked predominantly with chromaticism within a tonal framework but pushed towards the realm of atonality. The only difference is that Wagner focused on program music (mostly in the form of music dramas); versus Reger who was devoted to absolute music¹³.

Reger’s inventive use of harmonies have prompted scholars and researchers alike to ask the all-too-important question of whether if Reger’s music is tonal or atonal¹⁴. For Reger, theories and rules of harmonies have no place during his compositional process, he was much more concerned about the principle of the musical “line”. Strings of harmonies may not relate to each other functionally, but all work together and lead organically to a musical goal. He would often ask his students “do you hear a logical process?”¹⁵ Due to his paramount concern for the linear aspect of a composition, the intermediary harmonies only serve to propel the musical line

¹¹ Siegfried Mauser, *Ueber die formbildenden Tendenzen der Harmonie bei Max Reger* (Breitkopf & Haertel: Wiesbaden, Leipzig, Paris, 1998) 14.

¹² Mauser 16-17.

¹³ Mauser 19.

¹⁴ Sievers 55.

¹⁵ Sievers 71.

to its ultimate destination, often lacking a strong sense of tonal center. A quote from the theorist Ludwig Riemann reads “Reger’s sense of tonality is marked by an absence of solid structure; it is one which is shredded to ruins by the storm”¹⁶. In a similar vein, Rudolf Huesgen states that Reger does not treat the tonic key as the harmonic “center”, but has a tendency to veer off to far-flung tonalities and in the process, which veils or obscures the original key¹⁷. Andrew Mead reasoned Reger’s music to be operating primarily within a chromatic framework, with some aspects of traditional diatonic harmony still present: “rather than viewing or hearing Max Reger’s chromaticism against a background of diatonic norms...we should hear things the other way around”¹⁸ Gerd Sievers, the author of an important book that details with Max Reger’s use of harmonies, concludes that Reger’s music probably shouldn’t be categorized as atonal. Individual chords and harmonies are still based largely on triads—ambiguity of tonality results when succession of non-functional, non-tonal sounding chords are struck successively, creating an allusion of “wandering tonality”¹⁹. To be sure, the question raised at the beginning of this paragraph remains unanswered. Perhaps Reger was neither intentionally trying to convey a clear sense of tonal structure nor an absence of it by emulating what Schoenberg had done. Irrespective of these disparate opinions, the harmonic ingenuity of Max Reger is undisputed. Now we will turn our attention to Reger’s use of harmony as it applies specifically to his piano pieces. We will begin with the pieces in his early period.

Pieces in the Early Period

On the whole, many of the piano pieces composed during his early period are steeped in the late-Romantic tradition. The harmonic language left behind by the great masters of the era have made a lasting impression in these pieces as Reger began to embark on a journey in search of his own voice. The *Sieben Walzer* Op. 11 and *Lose Blaetter* Op. 13 are his earliest works and

¹⁶ Sievers 72.

¹⁷ Sievers 55.

¹⁸ Walter Frisch, [The Music of Max Reger](#) (The Musical Quarterly, Vol. 87, No. 4) 629.

¹⁹ Sievers 76-77.

are on the whole not very significant. They were composed in 1894 for Riemann's child, and Reger himself admitted that he was not pleased with them. Of the fourteen individual pieces contained in Op. 13, we find many stylistic affinities with various composers: No. 4 (Schumann), No. 9 (Schubert), and No. 13 (Liszt and Chopin). In No. 1, the second half of measure 15 (from here on abbreviated with m.) contains a surprising harmonic turn. It appears on the surface to be a recap of the opening theme, but the addition of flats quickly whisks the key to a far-flung cadence on Cb

Example 2.1: Op. 13, No. 1 mm. 13-16



The appearance of numerous flats starting from m. 32 of No. 3 is almost akin to Schubert's tendency in his pieces to gravitate toward flat keys, giving much harmonic color

Example 2.2: Op. 13, No. 3 mm. 30-33



The Fugue contains mostly diatonic harmonies with a few dissonances across different voices. Notable is the chromatic harmonies at the final cadence: the landing on a F7 chord is somewhat like Bach who uses this device to prolong the tonic, but the chromatic harmonies that follow in this instance is definitely very original

Example 2.6: Op. 13, No. 6 “Fugue”, ending

In No. 7 m. 24, Reger explores the dual function of the A major chord much like a pivot chord. The A major chord should have led to the key of D minor, but it actually becomes the first chord of the next sequence, which cadences in G major instead

Example 2.7: Op. 13, No. 7, mm. 18-25

No. 8 begins with a restless diminished seventh chord, and the abundance of chromaticism in the first line greatly undermines the fleeting establishment of D major as a tonal center

Example 2.8: Op. 13, No. 8, opening

Musical score for Op. 13, No. 8, opening. The score is in D major, 2/4 time. It features a complex, chromatic melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The piece begins with a diminished seventh chord. The dynamics range from piano (p) to pianissimo (pp). The score is written for piano.

No. 13 may have been inspired by the funeral marches of Chopin or Liszt. Dissonant harmonies are created in the outer sections by the clashes between the timpani (drone) and the chords in the higher register

Example 2.9: Op. 13, No. 13, mm. 5-8

Musical score for Op. 13, No. 13, mm. 5-8. The score is in B-flat major, 2/4 time. It features a complex, chromatic melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The piece begins with a diminished seventh chord. The dynamics range from piano (p) to pianissimo (pp). The score is written for piano.

To conclude, the harmonies employed in Op. 13 do operate completely within a tonal framework except a few local, abrupt harmonic shifts and some chromatic harmonies. This work is very much in the spirit of late-Romanticism.

The *Improvisationen* Op. 18 were a set of eight piano pieces composed in 1897. In these pieces, Reger begins to elevate the piano as a solo instrument as he infuses these pieces with elements of virtuosity. Nos. 1-2 are surprisingly romantic-sounding; containing a frequent use of

sequences and conventional harmonies. No. 2 gives off a dreamy atmosphere, much like something Schumann would write. In No. 3, the forceful movement from the G minor chord in m. 2 to F minor in m. 3 directly without preparation is noteworthy. Then again, almost to drive his point home, the passage thrusts back to G minor using a major IV chord in m. 4

Example 2.10: Op. 18, No. 3, opening

The musical score for the opening of Op. 18, No. 3, is presented in two systems. The first system contains measures 1 through 3. Measure 1 features a piano introduction with a forte (*ff*) dynamic, followed by a piano (*pp*) dynamic. Measure 2 shows a forceful movement from G minor to F minor. Measure 3 continues with a forte (*ff*) dynamic, followed by a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The second system contains measure 4, which features a forte (*f*) dynamic and a major IV chord, thrusting back to G minor.

Between mm. 18-20, we see a series of chords placed side by side which are not at all related by function (dominant seventh, diminished seventh, dominant seventh, dominant seventh, leading to a Vb13 to Eb major), creating tonal instability

Example 2.11: Op. 18, No. 3, mm. 16-20

The musical score for Op. 18, No. 3, measures 16-20, is presented in a single system. Measure 16 starts with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. Measure 17 features a piano (*p*) dynamic. Measure 18 continues with a piano (*p*) dynamic. Measure 19 features a piano (*pp*) dynamic. Measure 20 concludes with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The score shows a series of chords placed side by side, creating tonal instability.

Between mm. 19-20 in No. 4, a string of unrelated secondary dominants and their unconventional resolutions are further complicated by the speed of performance, rendering them almost impossible for the ears to understand

Example 2.12: Op. 18, No. 4, mm.15-20

Reger also began to defy the conventional cadence formula between mm. 122-124 in No. 5, consisting of the IV, bII, followed directly by the I chord (skipping the dominant harmony), all the while sustaining a tonic pedal underneath which greatly underplays the V-I authentic cadence

Example 2.13: Op. 18, No. 5, ending



In general, Reger’s harmonic language did not experience much change from the previous opuses as the harmonies still remained within the boundaries of tonality. Dissonant harmonies are rare and more of an exception. However, we can start to see a faint hint of the direction Reger intended to take in terms of expanding his harmonic vocabulary, mostly by employing unconventional chord progressions and placing unrelated chords next to each other.

The *Six Morceaux pour le Piano* of Op. 24 written in 1899 are those which were written as music for the “masses”, akin to popular salon music for public consumption and are therefore not very musically significant. There is nothing interesting to speak of in terms of the use of harmonies for the first five pieces of the collection, which are again very much Romantic in flavor and not distinct from the previous opuses. No.6 stands out as not only the most artistic of the set but also for its overt tribute to the style of Brahms which will be covered in more detail later on. A harmonic analysis/reduction between mm. 83-87 shows an overarching movement from the principal key of E minor to its relative major, G major—a normal, expected modulation. However, Reger has taken great measures to make sure the journey was an arduous one by wandering through different keys with plenty of chromatic movement of chords, a testament of the importance of the linear aspect of Reger’s music where harmonies serve to urge the music forward to its destination (in this case the eventual arrival in the key of G major).

Example 2.14: Op. 24 No. 6 mm. 83-87, harmonic reduction

Handwritten musical score for Example 2.14, Op. 24 No. 6, mm. 83-87. The score is in 6/8 time and features a treble and bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The music consists of two staves. The first staff has a treble clef and the second has a bass clef. The score is annotated with handwritten notes and symbols. The first staff has notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4. The second staff has notes: G3, A3, B3, C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3, C3. Annotations include: "E minor: i6 extension a minor VI of a minor", "expectation of c# minor thwarted", "chromatic movt to B major", and "I of B major ensuing G major". A second system of music is shown below, with notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4. Annotations include: "minor", "... etc", and "I of G major".

In this piece alone, Reger effectively foreshadowed the future path he was going to forge in harmonic innovation—a hallmark that would characterize much of his later works.

The *Sieben Charakterstuecke* of Op. 32, written in the same year as *Bunte Blaetter*, Op. 36 in 1899 represent the last two pieces before his “Wild Munich” middle period. In Op. 32, one hears the “ghosts” of Liszt, Brahms, Scriabin, and Rachmaninoff in many of the individual pieces. The outwardly passionate and at times tumultuous character is a reflection of the struggles Reger experienced during this time in his life as he sought desperately for acceptance in musical circles. Many in the collection could be treated as individual etudes for the many technical challenges they present to the players. Reger’s use of a chromatic lower neighbor helps to spice up the otherwise conventional diatonic progression between mm. 1-4 in No. 2. Not only do we have an illusion of the harmonies shifting quickly in and out of resolutions, these non-chord tones create an inner chromatic melody.

Example 2.15: Op. 32 No. 2, opening

a) Underlining progression

b) With chromatic lower neighbor: an arrangement

In No. 3, mm. 62-64 present an abrupt and unexpected key change from C major to Bb minor, complemented by a sudden crash in *ff*—a phenomenon confirmed in his laws of harmonies that any chords can precede or follow each other without preparation

Example 2.16: Op. 32, No. 3, mm. 61-64

61

pp

p

ff

p

a tempo

This jarring harmonic shift however, does help to accentuate a dose of humor in this playful *Burleske*. In the same piece between mm. 109-111, we see strings of chromatic harmonies across both hands in contrary motion

Example 2.17: Op. 32, No. 3, mm. 109-112

In No. 4, mm. 49-54 contain a string of unresolved dominant seventh chords in a series of sequences; in so doing, Reger avoids closure, and can carry the music further until a definite V-I cadence in Bb major four bars later. In this case, these interconnected chords only serve to urge the music onward to its Bb major destination, so they ought to be treated as passing harmonies in these sequential passages. Meanwhile, the chromatic line in the alto and tenor voices also serve to intensify and decorate the otherwise diatonic harmonies.

Example 2.18: Op. 32 No. 6 mm. 49-54, harmonic reduction

In No. 7, we have arguably one of the most harmonically jarring and dissonant passages encountered thus far. The sustained G pedal in the bass clashes harshly with the harmonies in the right hand. As the harmonic reduction shows (illustrated by the lines connecting the bass with the harmonies of the right hand), all the notes of the right hand harmony form dissonances with the note G in the left hand. Owing to its stylistic similarities to the composers of the Romantic era, the harmonies Reger used are still largely confined within that tradition.

Example 2.19: Op. 32 No. 7 mm. 38-39



Perhaps one trait which separates Op. 32 with the earlier opuses is the increase in the use of chromaticism: either in the form of chromatic inner voices decorating a diatonic progression; or in the strings of chromatic harmonies. Still, its use at this point is rather infrequent for it to be formally designated as the trademark of his harmonic language.

Pieces in the Middle Period

The appearance of *Sechs Intermezzi*, Op. 45, composed in 1900 ushers in the beginning of Reger's middle period of creativity. In these pieces, Reger seems to have taken the virtuosic qualities of his early period works to the limit. The texture and sound seemed to have sometimes blurred the composer's musical ideas and intentions. Its excessive demands on the player aside, the incessant expressive markings were an overkill, which in some ways may have done more damage to his credibility as a composer than elevating it. Also notable is his wasteful use of the dynamics in the *ff*-plus range. Because this piece should be viewed as a transition between his early and middle periods, the harmonies employed are in principle, not radically different than the ones he had used before. Similar to the Op. 32 pieces, there is an even more liberal use of chromatic harmonies. They are formed either across both hands (No. 4, mm. 125-129); or by strings of harmonies of various qualities arranged chromatically (No. 5, mm. 46 to the end)

Example 2.20: Op. 45, No. 4, mm. 126-127

126

sempre fff *crescendo*

V.

Example 2.21: Op. 45, No. 5, mm. 45-46

(45)

ff *ben legato*

3

Silhouetten, Op. 53, composed in the same year as Op. 45, are seven pieces which depict the outline of a person or object without revealing inner details. Nos. 2-5 could be seen as representing the stylistic features of Brahms, Grieg, Liszt, and Chopin. Though reliant on the models of other composers, these are very original pieces where Reger has evidently taken a leap forward to find his own voice apart from the traditions of the past. For these reasons, they have garnered widespread popularity amongst amateur pianists. The opening of No. 2 is strongly reminiscent of Brahms' opening of Op. 119 No. 1, however, the similarity stops there. Reger's harmonies are chromatically conceived; in addition, one starts to notice his use of suspensions and tied-notes, creating dissonances or new harmonies on subsequent beats

Example 2.22: Op. 53, No. 2, opening

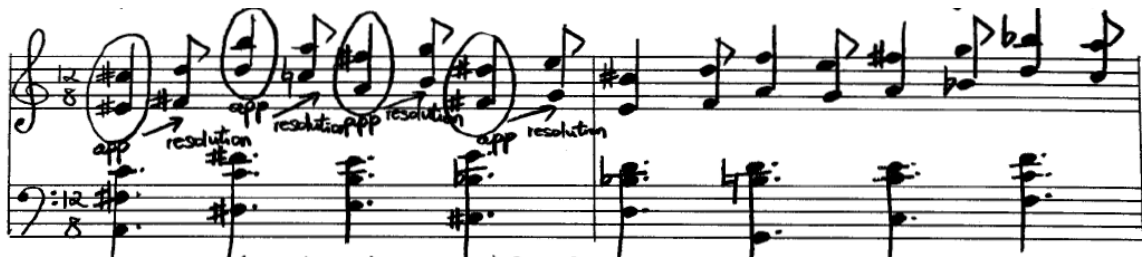


Example 2.23: Brahms Op. 119, Opening



In No. 5, harsh dissonant harmonies form on every primary beat of the bar underneath a diatonic progression. The harmonies are usually not clarified and resolved until the last eighth note of every group of three eighth notes. This is largely the result of the constant use of chromatic appoggiaturas on the primary beats of the measure, creating an off-balanced, comical effect almost like that of a broken music box.

Example 2.24: Op. 53 No. 5. Harmonies with chromatic appoggiaturas, arranged



Reger's use of harmonies and sonorities in No. 6 deserves special mention. As the harmonic sketch of the opening page shows, he began to explore with harmonies which afforded new color and sounds: such as the minor-major 7th chord, Vb13 (a chord formed from the whole-tone scale), and chords that hint to an augmented sixth (specifically the French 6th). The last page "*erstes Tempo*" gives off an almost impressionistic feeling not only in the choice of harmonies, but also in the feather-light right hand, as well as the overall veiled quality of the sound-world conveyed.

Example 2.25: Op. 53 No. 6. Opening harmonic progression

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the opening of Op. 53 No. 6. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has a treble clef staff with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a bass clef staff. The second system also has a treble clef staff with the same key signature and a bass clef staff. Handwritten annotations in the bass clef staff identify several chords: 'minor-major 7th' (twice), 'Vb13', and 'Fr. 6?'. The notation includes various chord symbols and melodic lines in both hands.

With respect to Reger's overall development in harmonic language, Op. 53 should probably be given the honor of being the most harmonically innovative up to this point in his life. In Op. 81 however, all the harmonic experimentation and exploration will have led to an overwhelming apex.

Variations and Fugue on a theme of J. S. Bach, Op. 81 will be remembered not only for its sheer scale and massive construction, but also as the epitome of what we have come to know as the true and mature "Regerian" style. It must be noted that this work is the first piano piece

which Reger has specifically called on the use of an archaic musical genre (variation), as character pieces dominate all of the previous opuses. Curiously, for the first two variations, Reger maintains the harmonic integrity devised by Bach in the original Cantata theme, as if Reger was taking a bow of admiration towards his beloved master of the past and acknowledging/respecting the relevancy of tonality as the foundation of all music. At the end of variation two (mm. 41-42), the original harmonies are decorated with chromatic chords in the inner voices which heightens the tension and results in the first climax.

Example 2.26: Op. 81, mm. 40-41

In variation 3, Reger has bid farewell to the traditions of the past and leapt into the future: m. 55 is a fine example of how Reger could take the original melody of the theme and completely re-harmonize it in chromatic harmonies, making it sound unique and refreshing.

Example 2.27: Op. 81, mm. 55-56

Variation 8 contains good illustrations of Reger's extremely chromatic language at this point in his life.

Example 2.28: Op. 81, mm. 138-139

Example 2.29 shows how Reger prolongs the dominant harmony and delays the ultimate arrival of the C major chord at the end by inserting highly chromatic progressions that play a pivotal role in intensifying the music, and thereby creating an ever greater need for the dominant to resolve. The overall tonal plan is clear (V7-I), but he severely undermines the certainty of the perfect authentic cadence by numerous chromatic chords which may seem, at times to our ears, incomprehensible.

Example 2.29: Op. 81 mm. 143-145, harmonic reduction

As if following the footsteps of variation 8, variation 9 contains a wealth of colorful chromatic chords that make this one of the most harmonically interesting variations. In the last beat of m. 146, a beautiful but unexpected use of the G7 chord that follows the ii half-diminished 7th in G-sharp minor helps to briefly tonicize the Neapolitan key of C major. The purely chromatic movement between these two chords allows Reger to quickly “switch gears” and venture to distant keys on a flip of a dime.

Example 2.30: Op. 81 m. 146, harmonic reduction

The image shows a handwritten harmonic reduction of the final measure of variation 9 in Reger's Op. 81, m. 146. It consists of two staves of music. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature is G major (one sharp). The first measure contains a B+ chord. The second measure contains a V7/Vi chord. The third measure contains a V7/II chord. The fourth measure contains an I6/4 chord. Below the staves, the key signature changes to C major (no sharps or flats).

Between mm. 204-205 in variation 12, Reger cleverly avoids traditional cadence formulas through the use of ample chromatic chords as he meanders through a complex web of harmonies, touching on multiple tonalities on its way. Reger introduces a half-diminished chord (treated as an ii half-diminished seventh of G-sharp minor) that is followed by an unconventional V7 of D-sharp minor (normally, a V chord of G-sharp minor should have been in place instead). He does resolve the next chord conventionally to a D-sharp minor chord (but its finality is greatly reduced by the second inversion position). Next, a Vb13 chord of C-sharp minor should lead logically into C-sharp minor, but is instead interrupted by a ii half-diminished seventh of C-sharp minor (which reverses the normal ordering of the chords: ii-V-i). Still, Reger had a chance to re-

introduce the V chord of C-sharp minor to cadence in that key, but instead uses chromaticism to bring the piece to his intended tonality: G-sharp minor.

Example 2.31: Op. 81 mm. 204-205, harmonic reduction

Handwritten harmonic reduction of a musical passage in G# minor. The score shows two staves with notes and chords. Handwritten annotations include: "ii°7 of G#", "V7 of D#", "does resolve", "V^b13 of C#", "ii°7 of C#", and "but goes to G# instead". A note in the bass staff is marked with an "x" and an arrow pointing to the "V7 of D#" annotation.

As stated earlier, Reger is a master of taking the same melodic fragment and re-harmonizing it to make it sound completely new. This procedure could clearly be observed in m. 254, variation 14. The second half of the bar contains the tail-end of the variation theme in the bass, which was harmonized to only two chords in its original form at the beginning of the work (I and V only). However, each melodic note in m. 254 is harmonized with its own chord, lavished with plenty of chromatic movements which greatly escalate the tension created and aptly serves to round off all the previous variations in preparation for the monumental fugue.

Example 2.32: Op. 81. Left: m. 254; compare with original harmonization in m. 14 on the right

Handwritten musical score comparing two harmonizations of a melodic fragment. The left side shows a complex, chromatic harmonization of measure 254 with notes on a treble staff and chords on a bass staff. The right side shows the original harmonization of measure 14 with a simpler chordal structure. Handwritten annotations include Roman numerals like "Vii°7", "V", and "i".

Reger's disposition to turn to chromatic harmonies peaked in the fugue and, coupled with his tendency to harmonize every melodic note, the chromatic language was all but unavoidable. Strings of chromatic chord passages abound, and seems to increase in frequency towards the end (the second half of m. 347, mm. 358-359, and the inner voices between mm. 360-362)

Example 2.33: Op. 81, mm. 360-361, "Fugue"



It would seem that the fugue subject is the unifying agent that prevents the whole fugue to slip into a complete dissolution of tonality. In m. 382 just before the *adagio*, Reger throws one final surprise at his listeners by feverishly preparing a climax of epic proportions, which seems to lead undeniably to a majestic final cadence in B minor, but instead it crashes on a Vb9 chord marked *sfff*—a world-shattering moment in the entire piece. The sudden drop in the register also aids in heightening the shock of this unpredicted harmonic twist.

Pieces in the Final Period

As we move into the third and final creative period in Reger's life, the output of his piano works declined sharply, resulting in only three opuses being composed over a span of nine years. Our discussion on harmony will take us first to examine the *Episoden* of Op. 115, finished in 1910. They are a set of eight character pieces of admirably high artistic level similar to those of Op. 82 *Aus meinem Tagebuch*. In No. 1, Reger seems to have taken a leap forward in time by inserting a passage between mm. 32-34 which has bi-tonal implications between the right hand and left hand. Each hand seems to be on its own tonal plane evidenced by the constant clash of the minor second dyads.

Example 2.34: Op. 115 No. 1 mm. 32-34, arranged



A similar passage could again be observed between mm. 68-73 in No. 3: almost every note between the right hand and left hand conflict each other, as if they were meant to be treated as two separate passages. Such harsh dissonant harmonies are quasi-Schoenberg in nature and definitely unique up to this point in his life. He once remarked to Emil Krause about his treatment of dissonance “my music is not for those who are weak in the stomach...I prefer a ragout of dissonance”²⁰.

Example 2.35: Op. 115 No. 3 mm. 68-73, arranged



No. 5 is a tranquil and peaceful piece with an imaginative use of harmonies. Though this piece was again inspired by the music of Brahms, the harmonic vocabulary is much expanded: tonal centers have been abandoned and substituted with a “musical prose”²¹ of harmonies flowing seamlessly from one to the next. With the inclusion of some readily more dissonant harmonies

²⁰ Brauss 155.

²¹ Brinkmann, Bittmann 636-637.

and passages, one may be tempted to think that Reger's harmonic language had change drastically from his works in the middle period. However, I am of the opinion that such harsh harmonic moments are still, on the whole, not frequent enough for us to label his use of harmonies as exceptionally different than his middle period. Certain passages, no matter how chromatic and dissonant, often are the results of chromatic embellishments over more conventional progressions and sequences, as in mm. 5-8 in No. 3. As the skeleton of the overall progression shows in **Example 2.36**, it is sequential—one that is very likely common in the Romantic music repertoire. The right hand melody is what obscures this underlying progression almost completely, severely distorting the harmonies. Furthermore, cadence formulas are still clear, especially at the ends of the individual pieces; even though they could be clouded by chromatic embellishments, destabilized with suspensions or appoggiaturas, or avoided by a clear V-I movement in the bass.

Example 2.36: Op. 115 No. 3 mm. 5-8. Harmonic progression



The appearance of the Teleman Variations, Op. 134 in 1914 represents Reger's second achievement in the variation form after the Bach Variations. With the theme taken from Teleman's *Tafelmusik* in B-flat major, its symmetrical structure and sprightly character demands a completely different treatment than the Bach Variations. The influence of Mozart is readily discernible as he endeavored to create a piece with more balanced and regular phrase structures with plenty of figurative elements. He sought to fashion a thinner texture, and strove on the whole to maintain the integrity of the harmonies of the theme. He seemed to have been

preoccupied with creating technically challenging variations rather than writing balanced character variations as Brahms had done²². Variations appeared to have been placed randomly, and the first nine variations are all similar in style and character which render them slightly boring and monotonous. Compared to the bold and more innovative harmonies used in Op. 81 and Op. 115, Reger's harmonic language in Op. 134 seems to have taken two steps backwards in time. The harmonic simplicity of the theme itself is retained in many variations. In most cases, one hears the harmonic progression of the theme clearly in its largely unaltered form. There are still some harmonically interesting variations deserving mention: variation 10 concerns itself with the chromatic movement of voices, forming dissonant harmonies through the use of appoggiaturas on the primary beats.

Example 2.37: Op. 134, variation 10, opening



Variations 11, 15, 17, and 19 are all embellished harmonically by chromatic upper and lower neighbors which again, form dissonant harmonies on the beat. The beginning of variation 23 displays Reger's talent in enlivening the straight-forward harmonic progression of I-IV taken from mm. 1-2 of the variation theme by inserting two extra chords in between, greatly increasing harmonic interest.

²² Brauss 162.

Example 2.38: Op. 134. Left: mm. 1-2 opening progression; Right: Variation 23, opening.

The image shows two musical excerpts. The left excerpt, labeled 'mm. 1-2', is in B-flat major (Bb+) and 3/4 time. It features a treble clef and a bass clef. The right excerpt, labeled 'Variation 23', is also in B-flat major and 3/4 time, with a treble clef and a bass clef. Below the bass line of the right excerpt, chord symbols are written: I, IV, I, bVII, V/IV, IV.

The *Ueberleitung*, as well as from m. 109 onwards in the fugue present themselves as the two most chromatically oriented sections in the entire piece. The *Ueberleitung* in particular is a reminder of the somber mood of Op. 81; while the chromatic sliding of the inner voices not only produce strings of chromatic chords, but also obliterate a sense of tonal center.

Example 2.39: Op. 134, *Ueberleitung*.

The image shows a musical score for 'Ueberleitung' in B-flat major, 3/4 time. The score is written for piano with a treble clef and a bass clef. The tempo is marked 'molto dolcè' and the dynamics are 'pp' and 'poco'. The score shows a chromatic progression in the bass line and a melodic line in the treble.

Reger's last piano opus, completed in 1915 just a year before his death was a collection of 12 piano pieces titled *Traeume am Kamin*, Op. 143. If one word could be used to describe the structure of these pieces, it would be that of economy of the musical materials. He had struggled for most of his life to search for the perfect balance between different perimeters of music (form,

texture, dynamics...etc.), and with this piece, seemed to have come close to that goal²³. His death just a year later is certainly unfortunate, as his true, mature style is just beginning to take shape. Most of the 12 pieces in the collection are soft and introspective; even more remarkable is the fact that all but one piece ends in a soft dynamic. Reger's goal in these pieces was to focus on musical ideas, without excessive dynamics or thick textures to drive home the point. On the surface, these sound much like the late character pieces of Brahms (Op. 116-119), except with an "updated" harmonic language. No. 2 serves as a fine example: this piece is very much in the spirit of Brahms, especially in its abundant arpeggiated and expansive left hand accompaniment. However, his harmonic invention and bold modulations far exceed what Brahms would have ever attempted (mm. 7-8, mm. 25-35)

Example 2.40: Op. 143, No. 2, mm. 25-28

The musical score for Example 2.40, Op. 143, No. 2, mm. 25-28, is presented in a grand staff. The right hand (treble clef) begins with a melodic line marked 'nuendo' and 'pp' (pianissimo). The left hand (bass clef) provides an arpeggiated accompaniment. The score includes dynamic markings such as 'mp' (mezzo-piano) and 'espressivo' (expressive). The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 3/4. The piece concludes with a final chord marked with a 'b' (flat) in the right hand.

In No. 6, the right hand spins out a highly chromatic melody with its gently rising and falling contour, complemented by the arpeggiated figures of the left hand, all helping to portray an impressionistic quality through the dissonant harmonies created within a foggy atmosphere

²³ Brauss 170.

Example 2.41: Op. 143, No. 6, opening

The musical score for Example 2.41 shows the opening of Op. 143, No. 6. It is written for piano in 3/4 time. The right hand plays a melodic line with a piano (*p*) dynamic, which then becomes a *p crescendo*. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment. The key signature consists of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat).

The diatonic harmonies used in No. 8 deserve special mention: amazingly, not a single accidental was used in this C major piece, most definitely a first in all of his compositions. The harmonic progressions are completely diatonic with several instances of conventional sequences clearly audible.

Example 2.42: Op. 143 No. 10 mm. 77-80

The musical score for Example 2.42 shows measures 77-80 of Op. 143 No. 10. It begins at measure 77. The right hand features a melodic line with a piano (*p*) dynamic that gradually decreases (*diminuendo*) to a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment. The key signature has one flat (F major).

In addition, chromatic sequences can be detected in other instances in the same piece such as between mm. 87-90 (for clarification, refer to **example 2.43** for Reger's use of chromatic sequence).

Example 2.43: Op. 143 No. 11, opening: harmonic reduction

The musical score for Example 2.43 shows the opening of Op. 143 No. 11, presented as a harmonic reduction. It consists of four measures. The right hand plays a melodic line, and the left hand plays a harmonic reduction, showing the underlying chords and their inversions. The key signature has one flat (F major).

Total chromatic passages are rare, as is the case from mm. 91-94.

Example 2.44: Op. 143, No. 10, mm. 90-94

Musical score for Example 2.44, Op. 143, No. 10, mm. 90-94. The score shows a piano piece with a treble and bass clef. The right hand features a series of parallel major chords moving chromatically downward. The left hand has a soft dynamic range with a chromatic line. Dynamics include 'nuendo', 'p', 'pp', 'diminuendo', and 'ppp'.

Here, a series of parallel major chords moving chromatically downward in the right hand form consonances with the left hand in a soft dynamic range, effectively adding color to the passage. In mm. 110-117, the prominence of the augmented triads with the blending effect of the pedal is another stylistic parody to the impressionistic sound world that so captivated Debussy.

Example 2.45: Op. 143, No. 10, mm. 112-117

Musical score for Example 2.45, Op. 143, No. 10, mm. 112-117. The score shows a piano piece with a treble and bass clef. The right hand features a series of augmented triads. The left hand has a one-measure ostinato in the bass. Dynamics include 'pp', 'diminuendo', and 'ppp'.

The harmonies employed in No. 12 is grounded by the one-measure ostinato in the left hand which continues uninterrupted from the beginning to the end; a simple V-I progression over a tonic pedal in the bass.

Summary

With respect to Reger's treatment of harmony and tonality as illustrated by all the piano pieces in the late period, there was an absence of advancement in Reger's harmonic language compared to his middle period. In fact, Reger's harmonic conception in Op. 143 seemed to have

struck a balance between the overtly lush romantic harmonies of his early period works and his bold and daring harmonic inventions of the middle period pieces. In these pieces, Reger effectively used harmonies and chords as a way to create compelling atmospheres (for example, augmented triads create a quasi-impressionistic aura). All 12 pieces end in their expected key indicated by the key signature (including those ending in a parallel key). One could perhaps venture to conclude that the harmonic procedures employed in Op. 143 are akin to what Brahms would have done had he lived longer. If we trace the development of Reger's harmonic language over his three periods, we could clearly see his inability to shake off the dominating sound world of the romantic traditions in the first period. This prompted him to strive for innovative and sometimes overwhelmingly complex and incomprehensible harmonic procedures in his "wild Munich" period. Then, as if realizing he had wandered too far, he blends the largely diatonic traditions of his first period with his unique uses of harmonies of the second, giving birth to the harmonic tendencies of his third and final period of composition. Judging by his return to a firmer sense of tonality in the last period, he was perhaps similar to what Copland, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky will have done later in their lives—many of them incorporating aspects of tonality in their later compositions.

Chapter Three: Counterpoint

The second point of discussion will emphasize on Reger's use of counterpoint, or the evidence of contrapuntal procedures in his pieces throughout his three creative phases. For the purpose of this discussion, it would be helpful to clarify the definition of counterpoint, as Oxford Music Online defines it as "a single part or voice added to another". In general, the hallmark of a contrapuntal composition is the presence of multiple independent voices that are sounded simultaneously, creating a unified and coherent texture. Being a fervent admirer of J. S. Bach and his music, it is not at all surprising that Reger was very fond of counterpoint, the evidence of which could be seen in many of his pieces. He was apparently attracted to the manipulative nature this texture afforded him. He wrote a substantial amount of two- and three-part canons, added an *obbligato* violin part to six *Sonatinas* of Clementi, a third voice to Bach's Two Part Inventions, and an *obbligato* horn part to an orchestral piece by another composer²⁴. According to Brinkmann and Bittmann, Reger's choice of frequently employing polyphonic texture should be seen as an attempt for it to act as a stabilizing agent in the complex web of chromatic harmonies, which often serves to deconstruct the overall structure²⁵ (this is especially true in the compositions of his middle period). This section will examine specifically on the development of Reger's use of counterpoint: was there an increase, or decrease in the use of contrapuntal procedures overtime? Or was there a change in the way he used counterpoint as we move into his later opuses?

Pieces in the Early Period

Even in the midst of the most unassuming, naïve character pieces of Op. 13 and 17, Reger openly calls on the Fugue genre to create a stark contrast between the romantic sound world and the more archaic system of the past. Op. 13 No. 6, titled "*Prelude et Fugue*", the Prelude features a songful melody against a constant background of 8th notes of the left hand,

²⁴ Brauss 33.

²⁵ Brinkmann, Bittmann 638.

almost like a heartbeat. The Fugue is in three voices, with the first subject modulating to the dominant key of C major, ushering in the real answer in that key. In Op. 17, No. 16 contains the title “*Fast zu Ernst*”, roughly translated as “almost too seriously” clearly has a fugal structure (hinted also by the subtitle “*Fughette*”). Constructed much in the same way as the Fugue in Op. 13 No. 6 in terms of key relationships and number of voices, one distinctive trait in Reger’s fugal writing could already be realized: his somewhat liberal treatment with the countersubject materials (as opposed to the consistent and strict treatments evidenced in Bach’s fugues). In both cases, there was no real “countersubject” to speak of, because the subjects and answers were always accompanied by melodic materials which were inconsistent with each other.

Example 3.1: Op. 17, No. 16, opening

Andante con espressione

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The first system (measures 1-5) begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system (measures 6-10) starts with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and includes a *crescendo* marking. The third system (measures 11-15) begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The tempo and mood are indicated as *Andante con espressione*.

Several notable uses of contrapuntal procedures are readily evident in the *Improvisationen* of Op. 18, of which two examples will be looked at. In No. 2 between mm. 12-15, the tenor voice is marked with *tenuto* indications, effectively anticipating the ensuing theme in the soprano in a quasi-imitative texture.

Example 3.2: Op. 18, No. 2, mm. 10-14



The deliberate use of *tenuto* markings to pinpoint important secondary voices is a procedure which Reger adheres to consistently throughout his life, helping players to navigate through a sometimes treacherous web of polyphony. Reger openly expresses his desire for a canonic texture in No. 6, from m. 27 onwards by the marking “*marcato il canone*”. The soprano introduces the theme first, followed systematically by the tenor voice in regular intervals.

Example 3.3: Op. 18, No. 6, mm. 27-31



In Op. 18, counterpoint begins to play a more important role (that is not to say however, that counterpoint was absent in his opuses prior to this piece), primarily in the emerging melodic importance of the left hand. The left hand often contains important melodic materials in the form

of a bassline, or as a counter-melody in the tenor voice against the principal melody in the soprano.

In the fifth piece of the Op. 26 *Sieben Fantasiestuecke*, we start to see the emergence of a three-part polyphonic texture (mm. 9-15). The primary melody is doubled in octaves in the soprano voice, while the alto and tenor voices fill in the gaps between the long melodic notes of the soprano melody, also in octaves. Meanwhile, the bass octaves add richness to the texture by virtue of its own melodicy, completing the three-part polyphonic texture.

Example 3.4: Op. 26, No. 5, mm. 12-15



Similarly in No. 4 of the Op. 32 *Sieben Charakterstuecke* from m. 29 onwards, Reger clearly delineates a three-part counterpoint by giving each part a distinct rhythmic profile (for example, the impassioned alto voice in constant 16th notes; the pattern of a 16th note followed by two 8th's in the soprano voice) as well as articulation markings designated for each (the soprano melody has accents; the alto harmonic fillers have long slurs; while sweeping, wave-like bassline has tenuto markings). Though cluttered by notes on the surface, Reger has carefully constructed the passage so that individual voices are clearly distinguished from others by giving them their unique identities.

Example 3.5: Op. 32, No. 4, mm. 29-30

29

ff sempre marc. il basso

Reger's fascination with the Fugue makes an appearance in the *Humoreske* (No. 6, mm. 14-), though in this particular instance more in the context of a joke. This is a *quasi-fugue*, in which the strict fugal structure is maintained only for a few measures, after which only the "head motive" (the first half of the subject) is retained. In Op. 45 No. 6, the Coda presents an interesting layering of textures which give the illusion of three independent voices between mm. 80-87. This passage features a downward chromatic line that cascades ferociously down the higher register of the piano in the right hand; while the left hand has to manage two separate lines by itself: the tenor voice hammers out the *meno mosso* theme of the middle section supported by the low bass octaves.

Example 3.6: Op. 45, No. 6, mm. 80-83

Più mosso

80

fff

37

To sum up, the contrapuntal procedures that were documented in the pieces of the early period were a result of Reger's exploration with counterpoint and what that texture could offer. Of particular note is the Coda of Op. 45 No. 6, demonstrating the juxtaposition and combination of three distinct textures and registers within a quasi-contrapuntal framework that looks forward to the Op. 81 variations, in which Reger will take contrapuntal procedures to ever new heights.

Pieces in the Middle Period

With the appearance of the Op. 81 variations, it was almost as if the counterpoint Reger had employed in all of the earlier opuses were simply preparatory exercises to ready himself for what he was about to undertake. Never in any of his pieces (before or after these variations) did he use contrapuntal procedures as the foundation upon which most of his musical inventions and creativity was based. With this piece, Reger proved himself to be a worthy follower and disciple of the legacy of J. S. Bach. For the entirety of the first two variations, strict four-part contrapuntal writing reigns supreme, due perhaps to the nature of the theme itself as it was presented in Bach's Cantata (the entrance of the left hand octaves in m. 1 is an imitation of the right hand melody). Individual voices adhere to their special melodic functions within the texture in a strict and systematic manner. It is likely that Reger wanted to keep the integrity of the theme before he gets "wild" by also retaining the original harmonies, as well as the strict polyphonic procedures.

Example 3.7: Op. 81 Variations: Theme

The image shows a musical score for the Theme of Op. 81 Variations. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff for the right hand and a bass clef staff for the left hand. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 6/8. The score includes several performance instructions: *sempre assai legato, la melodia sempre dolce (quasi Oboe solo)* above the treble staff; *sempre espressivo* and *p* (piano) below the treble staff; *sempre con pedale* below the bass staff; and a *tr* (trill) marking above a specific note in the treble staff. The music features a complex texture with multiple voices and a prominent bass line.

Example 3.8: Variation 1

Musical score for Example 3.8: Variation 1, measures 14-18. The score is in G major and 6/8 time. It features a piano (*p*) dynamic and the instruction *sempre espressivo ed assai legato*. The right hand contains a melodic line with a trill in measure 17. The left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment. The instruction *sempre con pedale* is written below the bass staff.

Example 3.9: Variation 2

Musical score for Example 3.9: Variation 2, measures 28-32. The score is in G major and 18/16 time. It features a piano (*p*) dynamic and the instruction *sempre espressivo ed assai legato*. The right hand contains a melodic line with a trill in measure 31. The left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment.

Other variations are composed in a free, unrestrained manner, but still included instances of quasi-counterpoint. For example, the end of measure 66 “*A Tempo*” sees the principal melody being tossed constantly between the right hand and the left hand, akin to the fugues of Bach where the subject would be “shared” between both hands.

Example 3.10: Op. 81, m. 67

Musical score for Example 3.10: Op. 81, m. 67. The score is in G major and 6/8 time. It features a piano (*p*) dynamic and the instruction *sempre espressivo ed assai legato*. The right hand contains a melodic line with a trill in measure 67. The left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment. The instruction *sempre con pedale* is written below the bass staff.

Variation 14 is an excellent example of Reger's contrapuntal procedure at its full fruition within this piece aside from the Fugue. The right hand spins out a constant string of 32nd notes as if it were a counter-subject. The bassline contains the original variation theme, or "subject", while the middle voices act as harmonic fillers that enrich the texture.

Example 3.11: Op. 81, variation 14

(240) **Con moto** (♩ = 96-104) (129) 29

ff crescendo

sempre con pedale
sempre ben marcato il basso

As in the previous fugal pieces of Op. 13 and 17, Reger does not follow the various thematic components of a conventional fugue strictly. The only consistently audible thematic element in the entire Fugue are the primary subjects. Reger treats the other voices freely, often changing the pitches according to his own intuition and retaining at most their superficial rhythmic profile. Again, he seems to have been guided more by the potential of what various chromatic movements of the voices could yield in terms of harmonic possibilities. To this end, the strict structure of the Fugue takes a back seat. However, noteworthy is his unparalleled mastery of combinatoriality. Starting in m. 320, fragments of the original variation theme make their first appearance.

Example 3.12: Op. 81, mm. 322-323

Musical score for measures 322-323. The score is in treble and bass clefs. Measure 322 is marked *ed espressivo*. Measure 323 is marked *meno p* and *tr*. The music features a complex texture with multiple voices and a trill in the right hand.

Example 3.13: A new fugue subject is introduced starting in m. 333

Musical score for measures 332-333. The score is in treble and bass clefs. Measure 332 is marked *ff non diminuendo*. Measure 333 is marked *a tempo* ($\text{♩} = 84-96$), *tr*, *sff*, and *pp*. The music features a complex texture with multiple voices and a trill in the right hand.

Example 3.14: This new fugue subject is then combined with the first fugue subject at the end of m. 359

Musical score for measures 358-360. The score is in treble and bass clefs. Measure 358 is marked *ben marcato il tema* and *ff*. Measure 359 is marked *ben marcato il tema*. Measure 360 is marked *ben marcato il tema*. The music features a complex texture with multiple voices and a trill in the right hand.

The *stretto* at m. 370 results in an amplification of this contrapuntal texture, embodying two entrances of the first fugue subject and the new fugue subject.

Example 3.15: Op. 81, mm. 371-372

sempre assai marcato il tema

370

ff

sempre assai marcato il tema

Amazingly, this is still dwarfed by what happens at the end of m. 375, where three entrances of the first fugue subject are piled on top of each other in addition to the second fugue subject.

Example 3.16: Op. 81, mm. 374-377 *Example continues on next page*

poco a poco allargando

374

crescendo

marcato

marcato

fff sempre assai marcato

(♩ = 60-64)

M.R. 10



Naturally, the use of counterpoint by Reger arrived at its summit in these variations. When one considers the total output of his piano works, the Op. 81 occupies a unique place which splits Reger's work in half: the contrapuntal procedures of the early opuses look forward to the Op. 81; while subsequent polyphonic constructions in later opuses pay homage to the Op. 81.

Because the focal point of this discussion concerns itself with Reger's use of contrapuntal procedures, his *Sechs Praeludien und Fugen*, Op. 99, composed between 1906 and 1907, will be touched upon briefly. This opus will be treasured mostly for its pedagogical value, as it is suitable for the instruction of advanced harmonies within a strict polyphonic texture. J. S. Bach, not surprisingly, serves as the model for these pieces. As is the case with many of his early pieces, the artistic quality of these preludes and fugues vary greatly. Some preludes exhibit the refreshing use of combining various motives; while thematic materials in the fugues are manipulated with craft and refinement. No. 6 features a highly expressive Prelude that combines intense chromaticism with polyphonic textures of varying densities. The improvisatory passage towards the end is very much in the spirit of the Prelude as evidenced by many preludes of J. S. Bach.

Example 3.17: Op. 99, No. 6, Prelude

The musical score for Example 3.17 consists of two systems of piano music. The first system shows the initial melodic lines in both hands, with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The second system begins with a *rit.* (ritardando) marking, followed by a *Meno mosso. (♩ = 40)* tempo change. The dynamic marking *ff* (fortissimo) is placed above the bass staff in the second system.

Reger's approach to the fugue is extremely systematic. Both themes have their respective expositions, which are then combined in double counterpoint, eventually leading to a climax with the subject in the bass in octaves (mm. 56-58).

Example 3.18: Op. 99, No. 6, Fugue—Climax

The musical score for Example 3.18 shows the climax of the fugue. It is presented in two systems. The first system features a *do ff* dynamic marking above the bass staff and an *assai marc.* (assai marcato) instruction above the treble staff. The second system continues with the *assai marc.* instruction below the bass staff. The music is characterized by dense, rhythmic patterns in both hands.

This Fugue is essentially conceived on a smaller scale than the Op. 81 Fugue, and could well represent his last utterance in a period dominated by contrapuntal procedures.

Pieces in the Final Period

As if Reger was still exhausted by his abundant and copious use of counterpoint in both the Op. 81 and Op. 99, contrapuntal procedure was met with a sharp decline in the first piece of his late period, the Eight Episodes of Op. 115. The collection was evidenced with a sparing use of counterpoint, much more like the pieces in his early period. Sometimes the middle voices form a counter-melody with another voice, such as in No. 2 between mm. 13-17, or in the opening of No. 4.

Example 3.19: Op. 115, No. 4, opening

The musical score for the opening of Op. 115, No. 4, is presented in two staves. The right hand begins with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a half note B4. The left hand begins with a half note G3, followed by a quarter note A3, and then a half note B3. The score includes dynamic markings: *mp*, *molto*, *mp*, *pp*, and *p crescendo*. Performance instructions include *espressivo* and *poco ritardando - - - a tempo*.

In other passages, the inner voices double up the melody in the right hand, as is the case with No. 5 from mm. 11-14.

Example 3.20: Op. 115, No. 5, mm. 10-12

The musical score for Op. 115, No. 5, mm. 10-12, is presented in two staves. The right hand starts with a half note G4, followed by a quarter note A4, and then a half note B4. The left hand starts with a half note G3, followed by a quarter note A3, and then a half note B3. The score includes dynamic markings: *pp* and *mp*.

In the faster movements however (especially nos. 6-8), the left hand has been relegated to mostly an accompaniment.

Example 3.21: Op. 115, No. 7, opening

On the whole, frequent contrapuntal procedures could not be observed in Op. 115. No. 5 comes close with its rather independent, but loosely constructed four-voice texture.

Example 3.22: Op. 115, No. 5, opening

Even then, this framework is sometimes interrupted by episodes which are often more freely conceived.

Flanked by two sets of smaller pieces is the Teleman Variations of Op. 134. Expectedly, the variations are concluded by a substantial fugue at the end; unexpected was however the fact that except the Fugue, counterpoint is largely absent across the variations. There are only two notable examples of counterpoint to speak of: the first of which is variation 7 in its canon-like construction evident especially after m. 9, almost like a two-part invention

Example 3.23: Op. 134, variation 7, mm. 9-10

(a tempo)

pp sempre
una corda

The second example is variation 13 in its close imitation of both the left and right hand melodic materials.

Example 3.24: Op. 134, variation 13, beginning

13. Variation
Tempo primo (♩ = 112)

pp
(sempre una corda)

As in the Fugue of the Op. 81 variations, Reger keeps the Fugue subject intact through its various appearances within the fugal texture, and treats the counter-subjects very freely. For example, the first statement of the counter-subject appears in m. 8.

Example 3.25: Op. 134, Fugue, mm. 6-10

poco marcato
sempre *ppp*

However, by its second appearance from m. 18, some rhythmic alterations could already be observed.

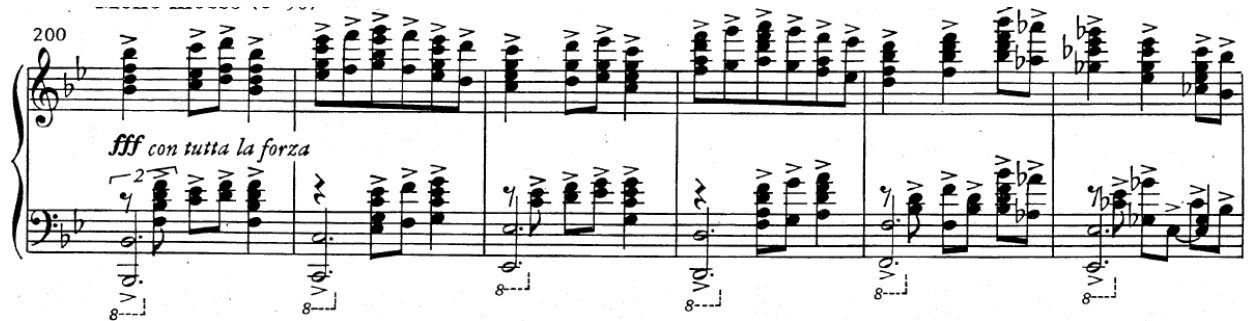
Example 3.26: Op. 134, Fugue, mm. 16-20

The fact that he was not too concerned about maintaining the thematic consistency of the counter-subject probably had to do with his preoccupation with harmonizing each subsequent statement of the subject with new harmonies—thereby necessitating the need to “fudge” the counter-subject. Striking are the various interjections of freely-composed, non-contrapuntal episodes which interrupt the flow of the Fugue; in this regard, the Fugue of Op. 81 unfolds much more organically and in some ways superior because of it. Reger was not ashamed to display his superb combinatory skills as he had demonstrated in the fugue of Op. 81. He combines the original fugue subjects in *stretto* from m. 179 onwards.

Example 3.27: Op. 134, Fugue, mm. 178-182

Adding the second fugue subject on top of this texture from m. 200 results in a satisfying *fff* climax.

Example 3.28: Op. 134, Fugue, mm. 200-205



As we can see, Reger seemed to have treated the Op. 134 Fugue in a more relaxed and spontaneous way. The fugue subjects remain as the only elements that would categorize this piece as such. The overall lack of counterpoint exhibited in the variations would be furthered in the 12 pieces of Op. 143, where it became almost non-existent. The little counterpoint it contained is no different than those Reger had already undertaken in the previous opuses and therefore do not warrant the need for mentioning them. The left hand has assumed the role of an artistic and tasteful accompanist, who helps to clarify and accentuate the musical intentions of the piece.

Summary

As we survey Reger's use of counterpoint through his three periods of creative output, we observe a similar trend as those that governed the development of his harmonic language. In the first period, the use of counterpoint is still very much in its infancy. It began with the use of the Fugue genre in small scales, expanding later to the creative use of a three-tiered contrapuntal textures in non-fugal compositions. The use of counterpoint peaked with the Op. 81 Variations and in some ways, also in the Op. 99 Preludes and Fugues. In the last period, contrapuntal

procedures diminished significantly, its occurrences even less than those pieces of the first period (with the obvious exception of the Fugue in Op. 134). We can therefore presume that there is some kind of relationship between his harmonic language and his use of counterpoint. It seems as if though the extremely chromatic tendencies of his harmonies in his middle period may partly be the result of his more frequent use of counterpoint, as the interplay of voices produce many chromatic chords in close succession, especially in his Fugues.

Chapter Four: Texture

Central to the piano works of Reger seemed to have been his intention in using the piano as a vehicle to realize the true potential of the instrument for maximum color possibilities by juxtaposing textures, characters and dynamics on a large scale. In light of this, we now turn our attention to the most prevailing traits of his use of texture in his piano works. By and large, his use of texture depends largely in his octave doubling and block chords, a feature already observed as we examined his contrapuntal procedures particularly in his variations and fugues. The focal point of our discussion will be to notice prevalent trends in the use of texture throughout his three creative periods. Additionally, we will explore the relationship between texture and his use of harmony and counterpoint on whether his use of texture is largely dependent on his harmonic language and/or contrapuntal procedures. This section will also look at a few examples of unique textures in his piano works which are specific to the organ.

Pieces in the Early Period

Reger's tendency to call on the use of octaves is already present in the miniature pieces of Op. 13. In No. 7, the thicker texture is the direct result of the unending octave doublings in the left hand which persist through the entire first page.

Example 4.1: Op. 13, No. 7, opening

The image shows the opening of a piano piece in 3/4 time. The right hand (treble clef) plays a series of chords and single notes, while the left hand (bass clef) plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with octave doublings. The music is marked with a forte 'f' dynamic and includes accents and slurs. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

In No. 12, this four-part chorale is also filled with octaves that makes the passages sound considerably richer—as if the notes are echoing within the expansive space of a massive cathedral.

Example 4.2: Op. 13, No. 12, mm. 8-12



The Lied-like No. 10 with its three-tiered texture is worth mentioning, as the piano takes on the role of the solo singer and accompanist simultaneously.

Example 4.3: Op. 13, No. 10, opening



As we progress through the pieces of Op. 13, the use of texture seems to be evolving as well. The earlier pieces started mostly with a relatively transparent and thin texture; but gradually adopted an increase in density (especially from No. 10 onwards). The thickening of the texture is the result of octave doublings, compact chords, and contrasting registers.

The *Improvisationen* of Op. 18 is a perfect illustration of the influence of Romantic composers, most notably of Brahms, on Reger's use of texture. In No. 4, not only is the expansive range of the left hand indicative of Brahms, the thick texture of the middle section (resulting from plenty of octave doublings and chords, two against three's) all hark back to the stylistic traits of Brahms, such procedures could again be observed in No. 5.

Example 4.4: Op. 18, No. 4: Opening

Andante semplice

p dolce *mf*

Example 4.5: Op. 18, No. 4: Middle Section

20

Più vivace

f *stringendo*

Extended passages of contrasting blocks of textures (exaggerated even more by the disparity of the registers), calls on the opening of Brahms' F minor piano sonata.

Example 4.6: Op. 18, No. 5, mm. 8-10

Example 4.7: Brahms: Piano Sonata Op. 5, first movement: Opening

Allegro maestoso

f *cresc.*

To say that Reger was not aware, or even under the spell of the Lisztian bravura technique when he wrote No. 8, one might as well have denied the influence J. S. Bach had on Reger. Titled “*Etude brillante*”, this is a virtuosic piece steeped in the Lisztian tradition. The blistering octaves and rapid alternating patterns between both hands are quite common in the piano texture of Liszt. The Brahmsian texture held sway even in Op. 24 No. 6, confirmed by the fact that this piece was dedicated to Brahms. The gradual thickening of the texture is partly due to the increasing melodic importance of the left hand, not only in its doubling with the right hand melody in octaves and in thirds, but also in establishing its own melodic material independent from the right hand, resulting in contrapuntal construction.

Example 4.8: Op. 24, No. 6, mm. 40-41

40

ritardando *a tempo, con tutta la forza*

Example 4.9: Op. 24, No. 6, mm. 46-48. Left hand melody elevated, resulting in a bottom-heavy texture

Again, the expansive left accompaniment figures is an open emulation of the master. Meanwhile, the extremely turbulent and dark opening of Op. 32, No. 1 is almost Rachmaninoff-like. The dense texture is the product of the constant octave onslaught in the low register of the piano. Multiple layers of textures can be detected here as polar opposite registers are contrasted.

Example 4.10: Op. 32, No. 1, opening

To sum up, the texture of Op. 18 and Op. 32 as a whole becomes undeniably thicker owing to the sound world left behind by Brahms, Liszt, and Rachmaninoff. Additionally, we start to see how counterpoint could play a factor in contributing to a richer texture in Op. 24, No. 6.

Pieces in the Middle Period

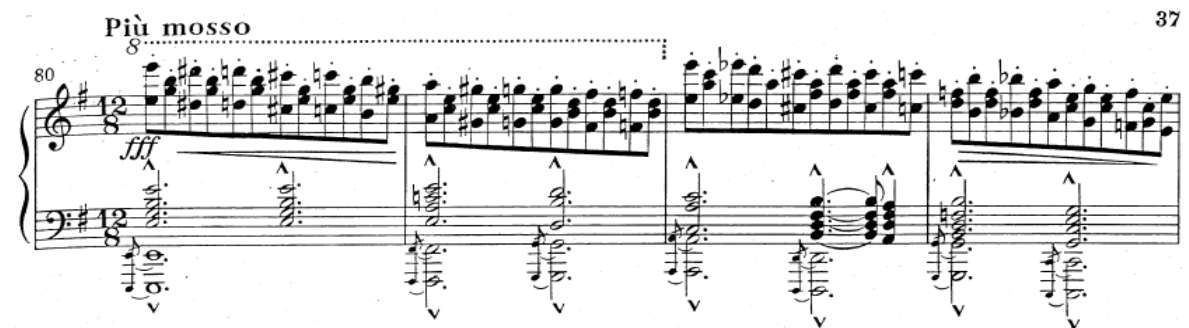
As we begin our examination of the textural characteristics of the pieces in the middle period, the Six *Intermezzi* of Op. 45 serve as the best example of how various factors, when unchecked, could lead to an almost chaotic mess of sonorities, rendering it impossible to comprehend. Firstly, dynamic markings in Op. 45 frequently exceed *ff*, resulting in extended passages with an unrelentingly high volume; secondly, the unsparing use of thick chords over prolonged periods of time, as in No. 3, mm. 18-19.

Example 4.11: Op. 45, No. 3, m. 18



Thirdly, the excessive utilization of the lower range of the piano in octaves (No. 6, mm. 80-87).

Example 4.12: Op. 45, No. 6, mm. 80-83



Finally, the close proximity of chords as they follow one after the other in close succession (No. 5, m. 46 to the end).

Example 4.13: Op. 45, No. 5, mm. 47-48



The image shows a musical score for two staves, likely piano and violin. The music is in a key with two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 2/4 time signature. The score begins at measure 47. The piano part features dense, overlapping chords and arpeggiated figures, while the violin part has a more melodic line with some grace notes. The texture is very dense and complex.

With Op. 45, it was clear that Reger had reached the textural limit as to what is actually achievable on the piano, beyond which everything becomes white noise. Then, almost in an apologetic manner, the *Silhouettes* of Op. 53 stood at the opposite end of the spectrum. This is evidenced even at the beginning of No. 1 with its apparent clarity in texture.

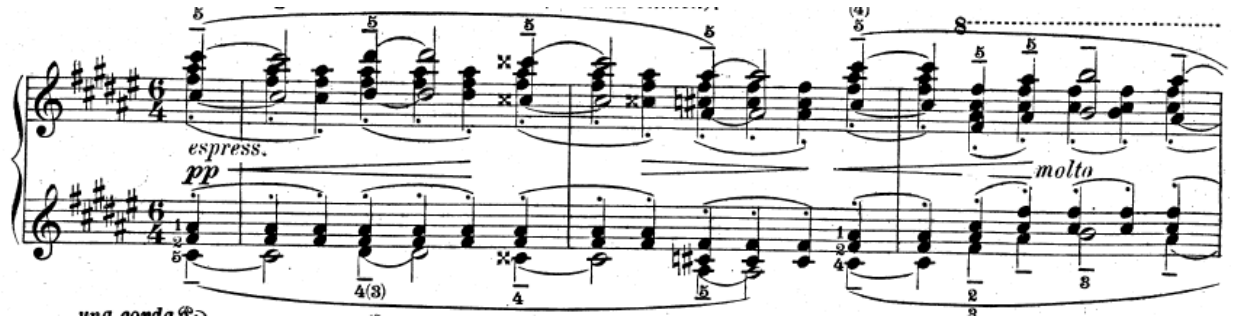
Example 4.14: Op. 53, No. 1, opening



The image shows the opening of a musical score for two staves, piano and violin. The tempo is marked "Äusserst lebhaft. (1)" and the dynamics are "pp" (pianissimo) and "poco". The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The piano part features a simple, clear harmonic accompaniment, while the violin part has a more active, melodic line with some triplets and slurs. The texture is much clearer and less dense than in Example 4.13.

No. 3 opens with an extraordinary texture which is extremely unusual for Reger up to this point in time: diatonic chords in the high register flow seamlessly from one to the next, creating an ethereal and magical atmosphere not seen or heard before.

Example 4.15: Op. 53, No. 3, opening



Between mm. 29-31 in No. 2, we sense how Reger’s texture on the piano is intimately linked to his concept of polyphonic texture on the organ, especially in the presence of the organ pedal (marked by long slurs in the left hand octaves). This organ-specific texture will be exploited by Reger thoroughly in his Op. 81 Variations.

Example 4.16: Op. 53, No. 2, mm. 29-31



The lighter and more transparent texture is maintained in the next opus, the *Zehn Klavierstuecke* of Op. 79a. Because these pieces were intended to supply the publisher Ernst Rabich in the form

of small character pieces, he restricted himself from the overbearing texture of many of the previous opuses.

The maturing of Reger's compositional craft in the area of textural manipulation, just like his use of harmonies and counterpoint, peaked in the Op. 81 Variations almost by default. Constant shifting of textural thickness and sonority is a hallmark of this variation set. He achieves a voluminous sound through register juxtapositions (the disparity of register between the octave melody and the harmonic fillers in the middle from m. 92 on);

Example 4.17: Op. 81, mm. 92-94

Allegro moderato (♩ = 100 - 108)

(92)

f e poco a poco crescendo

sempre con pedale

Or the simultaneous presentation of multiple layers of textures across different registers (we can clearly see three separate textures/lines from m. 240 on)

Example 4.18: Op. 81, m. 243

243

The extensive range of the piece meant that sometimes passages traverse quickly through high and low registers of the keyboard, resulting in abrupt changes in textural density²⁶ (mm. 181-187).

Example 4.19: Op. 81, mm. 181-184

The image displays a musical score for Example 4.19, Op. 81, mm. 181-184. The score is written for piano and is in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It consists of two systems of music. The first system, starting at measure 181, shows a complex texture with many notes in both hands, including some accidentals and slurs. The second system, starting at measure 183, is marked *molto agitato* and *ff crescendo*. This section features a more rhythmic and dense texture, with many notes in both hands and some accidentals. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

His use of texture can be distilled down to two general functions: to create block-like sonorities resulting from a chordal texture (m. 246 is a fine example);

²⁶ Holliman 39.

Example 4.20: Op. 81, m. 246



Or to fashion polyphony from a combination of lines or accompaniment figures (found predominantly in the first two variations as well as the Fugue)²⁷

Example 4.21: Op. 81, “Fugue”, mm. 342-343



Increase in contrapuntal complexity in combination with a chromatically-oriented movement of chords often work together to create a dense texture (as in variation 1, where increased activity in the middle voices lead to an enriched texture; between mm. 41-42, chromatic movement in the middle voices thickens the texture).

²⁷ Holliman 46.

Example 4.22: Op. 81, mm. 40-41

Unfortunately, the lack of strict counterpoint with an excess of chromatic passing notes generate an overwhelmingly thick texture, sometimes to the detriment of the clarity of music structure as exemplified between mm. 360-362²⁸

Example 4.23: Op. 81, mm. 362-363

The organ texture plays a considerable role especially in climatic moments, and never before in the previous opuses have there been such clear and numerous references to this kind of texture. These include: the abundant uses of octave legato passages, especially in the left hand (the theme and the first two variations); the clear separation of registers, almost like the different stops used on the organ (mm. 97-98);

²⁸ Brauss 34.

Example 4.24: Op. 81, mm. 97-98

97 *ff* *assai marcato il tema* *un poco ritardando* *ff*

The placement of the original variation theme in the left hand (a similar phenomenon can be observed in many of J. S. Bach's organ chorales);

Example 4.25: J. S. Bach Organ Chorale: *Von Himmel hoch da komm' ich her*. Melody in the pedal (lowest clef)

The expansive range, thick chords, dynamics peaking at *ffff*, the sound of which can only be truly attained on an organ. The textural variety of Op. 81 could be compared to someone looking into a kaleidoscope. Reger has effectively projected and amalgamated many tendencies of his treatment to texture into this masterpiece.

Pieces after Op. 82

Beginning with the various volumes of Op. 82 *Aus meinem Tagebuch*, Reger's textural conception began to take on a new course. Pieces in that collection began to be more compact and concentrated. They avoid extremes of dynamics and excessive textural contrasts, likely as a result of his encounter with the music of Mozart around this time²⁹. The texture of the pieces in Op. 115 are much trimmed down and mostly very transparent compared to the pieces of his middle period. This is the result of his preference to score faster and more lively movements in a two-tiered texture, consisting of primarily two elements, which in most cases could be distilled down to the principal melody and the accompaniment (as in the opening of No. 7).

Example 4.26: Op. 115, No. 7, opening

The image shows the opening of a musical piece in 2/4 time, marked 'Vivace, quasi Presto' with a tempo of 132-144. The score is written for piano and features a two-tiered texture. The right hand plays a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. Dynamics include piano (p), forte (f), and piano (p) markings. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

Upper ranges of dynamic outbursts (*ff* and *fff*'s) are still present, but are countered immediately by passages of lighter character and thinner texture. Even at the climatic ending of No. 8, thick chords are balanced by octaves, thereby effectively preventing an uncontrollable build-up of sound. At the same time, we could also see his intention in striving for a more transparent texture by the simple fact that he chose to write the thick chords in the high register of the piano while the notes of the lower register contained only octaves (mm. 124 to the end)

²⁹ Brauss 162.

Example 4.27: Op. 115, No. 8, ending



In the Op. 134 Teleman Variations, Reger resorted to homophony as the primary texture that governs the majority of the piece. As in the Op. 115 Episodes, the texture of Op. 134 is fairly transparent and clear in most cases. Long gone are the excessive three or four *f*'s which littered the pages of his middle period compositions. Many variations are conceived in a simple two-layered texture consisting of the melody and the accompaniment. Successive thick chords are also extremely rare in this piece (with the obvious exception of the towering climax in the Fugue starting in m. 188). All in all, harmonic simplicity as well as the infrequent use of complex and chromatically-based counterpoint all helped to contribute to a leaner texture—much in the spirit of works from the Classic period. The same trend extends to his last piano piece, Op. 143. The open parody to Chopin's Berceuse Op. 57 in No. 12 is unmistakable, not only in its lilting rhythm and unchanging texture created by the left hand ostinato pattern, but in its overall construction of progressing from the simple melodic lines in the opening to the extremely ornate filigree in the upper register of the piano

Example 4.28: Op. 143, No. 12, opening. Note similarity to the Chopin Berceuse below

espressivo, ma dolce

p *p* *più p*

Example 4.29: Chopin: Berceuse Op. 57

F. Chopin, Op. 57.

Andante.

p *dolce*

Ped. * Ped. * Ped. * Ped. *

Summary

Coincidentally, the observed changes in terms of Reger's utilization of texture across his three creative periods were consistent with those of the developments and trends shown in his harmonic language and the use of counterpoint. The rich and opulent piano texture of Brahms must certainly be given a prime place in his early period. This was followed briefly by a series of opuses (Op. 53, 79a) which demonstrated a lighter and thinner texture. With the Op. 81 Variations, Reger combined characteristics from both in addition to an organ-inspired texture, displaying remarkable breadth. All the pieces after Op. 81 saw Reger again reverting back to the leaner and more transparent texture he experimented with in Op. 53 and 79a.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

*“Viel Feind’, viel Ehr”*³⁰ (many enemies, much honor), is an old German maxim which is the epitome of Reger’s life as a composer. On the one hand, his reputation as a composer is unanimous, such as the opinions voiced by Reger’s strongest critic, Dr. Rudolf Louis “...stupendous compositional skills, the unfathomable richness of his contrapuntal combinations, and his power of invention with respect to new and unheard-of harmonic progressions”³¹; on the other hand, many of his critics wouldn’t think twice about openly trashing his works with verbally abusive words. These polar opinions were mirrored in the overall quality of his piano pieces: ranging from the superficial and insignificant pieces of his early periods to the towering achievement of the Op. 81 Variations. It is presumably this great inconsistency in his total piano output that sealed the fates of many of them as pieces ill-suited for the concert halls. Through an examination of Reger’s harmonic language, his use of counterpoint and texture, one could logically place Reger as the mediator between Brahms on the one hand, and Schoenberg and Hindemith on the other³². He was never interested in furthering the programmatic music of Wagner and Richard Strauss, but instead he preoccupied himself with extending the legacy of Bach and Brahms in the forms of absolute music. While traditional forms and procedures abound, Reger was not afraid to use inventive harmonies in his pieces; leading to the scholar Walter Frisch to assign him the distinguished honor of being a “historicist modernist”, characterized by his disposition to look backward and forward at the same time³³. It is my hope that through this brief survey of his piano works, one could begin to appreciate the substantial contribution Reger made to the piano repertoire at such a critical junction in music history. He embraced tradition and change without partiality, and was bold enough to set out on a treacherous path of combining both in an era where composers sided with either one of the two camps. Max

³⁰ Brauss 21.

³¹ Brauss 5.

³² Brinkmann, Bittmann 641.

³³ Frisch 630.

Reger must certainly be viewed as one of the most important figures who bridged the gap between the romantic and contemporary periods. In the meantime, the wealth of piano pieces he left behind will be waiting patiently for a renaissance—a moment when his works will be rediscovered and viewed for their true worth and value.

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Scores

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