



Max Reger: Organ Works

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[American Record Guide](#) (Mulbury - 2004.05.01)

The Audite release brings us one of the few remaining organs of Reger's time, an important and huge one – the 1913 Rieger in the Konzerthaus, Vienna. Its 115 stops and 5 manuals offer everything an organist could possibly desire for Reger. There are 49 stops of 8' pitch alone.

Two of Reger's grandest and most difficult organ works have been coupled here: the F-sharp minor requires 35 minutes, the E-minor about 40. Of the two, the first work (1903) may be the easiest to listen to. The E-minor, composed in 1913 for the opening of an immense new Sauer concert organ in Breslau, belongs among his last works, completed only a scant three years before his death. By this time Reger's writing had become predominantly atonal, and it is fascinating to observe in this work how ingeniously Reger nullifies a tonal center, using only chromaticism and traditional harmonic structures. There are no chords in fourths or seconds, no planning, no bitonality, etc.

Bernhard Haas, professor of organ at the Academy in Stuttgart, performs with impressive, even singular mastery of this rarely heard literature. He is extra-meticulous with Reger's rather detailed phrasing, registration, and dynamic indications. He has the big virtuoso technique necessary for this complicated music. He believes, rightly, that Reger's tempos need to be taken more slowly than almost any other composer's, given the rapid harmonic rhythm germane to the music. In fact, his timings for these two works correspond exactly to those of the great Karl Straube, for whom Reger wrote most of his organ compositions, and who performed many of the premieres. All of this, along with Haas's choice of the Konzerthaus organ, makes the music come alive as I have seldom heard it. It is certainly one of the finest Reger recordings I have encountered. Notes and sound are both outstanding. (Note that this is Bernhard Haas, not Rosalinda Haas, whose Reger organ recordings we have reviewed before [MDG, Mar/Apr 1990]. They were made on a much less suitable organ.)