

## JIM'S (MOSTLY MAX REGER) PRESENTATION – 24/04/2021

### Reger

#### Mariä Wiegenlied op. 76 (*Schlichte Weisen*) no. 52

Håkan Hagegård (baritone), Anders Ohrwall (piano)

Reger wrote almost three hundred songs, spanning his creative output from the age of seventeen to his final song created the year before his death. The sixty small songs in *Schlichte Weisen* (*Simple Ways*) op. 76 were composed between 1903 and 1912 and give us Reger's characteristic stylistic elements in a more easily digestible package: he wrote them to refute the charge that his songs were impossible to perform and impossible to sell. Perhaps Reger's single most famous song is the *Mariä Wiegenlied*, which might seem 'simple' at first glance, but really isn't: the seemingly effortless shifts of tonal place (from F major to D major to A minor in the first three phrases) and of metre required consummate artistry to create. As Mary bids the child lay its weary head upon her breast, Reger shifts to a darker, warmer, richer harmonic fabric for just two bars.

*Mary sits in the rose bower  
And rocks her little Jesus,  
Softly through the leaves  
The warm wind of summer blows.*

*A brightly coloured bird  
Sings at her feet:  
Go to sleep, sweet child,  
It's time to go to sleep!*

*Your smile is lovely,  
Your happy sleep lovelier still,  
Lay your tired little head  
Against your mother's breast!  
Go to sleep, sweet child,  
It's time to go to sleep!*

TEXT – MARTIN BOELITZ

### Beethoven

#### 11 Bagatelles op. 119 (ca. 1822): 11. Andante, ma non troppo

Herbert Schuch (piano)

By the end of 1803, Beethoven had already sketched bagatelles Nos. 1 through 5 of the eleven that comprise his op. 119 (along with several other short works for piano that he never published). In 1820, he composed the last five and published them as a set of five in 1821. The following year, he revised his old bagatelle sketches to construct a new collection for publication, adding a final bagatelle, No. 6, composed in late 1822. He then sent off this set of six to England for publication in 1823, along with Nos. 7 through 11, which had not yet been published in England. The English publisher printed all eleven bagatelles together as one collection, and it is unclear to what degree this represents the composer's intentions. Some scholars have argued that the two halves of Op. 119 — Nos. 1 through 6, and Nos. 7 through 11 — are best thought of as separate collections. However, it is also possible that when Beethoven composed No. 6 in late 1822, he had already planned to send all eleven pieces to England. In that case, No. 6 would not be meant as a conclusion to the first five, but as a way to connect them with the latter five. The key relationship and thematic similarities

between No. 6 and No. 7 support this hypothesis, as does the fact that in subsequent correspondence, Beethoven expressed only satisfaction with how the bagatelles were published in England.

## Reger

### Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Beethoven op. 86

Theme. Andante – Variation I. Un poco più lento – Variation II. Appassionato – Variation III. Andantino grazioso – Variation IV. Vivace – Variation V. Andante sostenuto – Variation VI. Allegretto con grazia – Variation VII. Poco vivace – Variation VIII. Allegro pomposo – Fugue. Con spirito

Norrköping Symphony Orchestra conducted by Leif Segerstam

Max Reger composed his Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Beethoven during the summer of 1904. The work was originally written for two pianos (four hands), and in that form it became one of the composer's favorite concert pieces. (The Beethoven Variations were on the program of his final recital in April 1916, in what was his 132nd performance of the work since its premiere.) The orchestral version dates from 1915. It is one of a series of orchestral pieces that Reger wrote during this late period of his life, when he was working toward the composition of a symphony – a goal he never in fact achieved, despite his enormous productivity.

More than many of his modernist contemporaries, Reger was deeply attached to the variation form, which allowed him both to pay homage to distinguished predecessors and to show his mastery of the most advanced techniques of thematic transformation, harmonic expansion, and counterpoint. Beside op. 86, the great variation sets of Reger, each of which also comprises a fugue, include the Bach Variations (op. 81), and Telemann Variations (op. 135), both for solo piano; and the Hiller Variations (op. 100) and Mozart Variations (op. 132), both for full orchestra.

Reger's models may be said to include three monuments of the nineteenth century, Beethoven's Diabelli Variations (1819-23) and Brahms's Variations on a Theme of Handel (1862) and Variations on a Theme of Haydn (1873). Each of these earlier works ends with a contrapuntal tour-de-force – fugues in the case of the Diabelli and Handel Variations, and a passacaglia in the Haydn Variations. The relationship of Reger's Beethoven Variations to Brahms's Haydn Variations was especially close. The themes are in the same key and share certain melodic characteristics. Brahms's work also began life as a two-piano composition and was then arranged for orchestra.

The theme of Reger's Beethoven Variations is in B flat. The melody is quite regular in structure, comprised of two eight-measure segments, separated by a two-measure transition and followed with a four-measure coda. In his orchestration, Reger highlights this sectional structure by alternating the segments among different instrumental groups.

The orchestral version of is no mere transcription of the two-piano original. Reger reduces the number of variations from twelve to eight, thus bringing it into line with the Mozart Variations and reducing the total time to under thirty minutes (so that, he hoped, it might be programmed more readily). Reger also reverses the order of certain pairs of variations, such that the original III-IV become II-III, the original VI-VII become IV-V, and the original X-XI become VI-VII. With such revisions, Reger seeks to maximize contrast between successive variations.

The sequence of keys in the orchestral version is radical. After the theme, the tonic B flat does not reappear until variation VI. The scheme is: B flat (theme); G major (var. I); C minor (var. II); F major (var. III); D minor (var. IV); E flat major (var. V); B flat major (var. VI); D minor (var. VII); B flat major (var. VIII and fugue). The contrast of meter and of tempo between variations is just as extreme. After the theme and variation I, both in 4/4, Reger shifts to 9/8 (var. II), then 4/8 (var. III), and so forth. Reger's variation technique is equally advanced. The original tune – one of Beethoven's most hummable melodies – becomes atomized or broken down into motivic particles such that it is often unrecognizable.