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## Modern Organ Style in Karl Straube's Reger Editions

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# Abstract

## ‘Modern’ organ style in Karl Straube’s Reger editions

This dissertation examines Karl Straube’s Reger editions of 1912, 1919 and 1938, in the belief that the full flowering of ‘modern’ organ style is presented in the 1912 and 1919 editions and confirmed retrospectively by the inherent contradictions of the 1938 edition. Straube (1873–1950) was a child of his time, with an artistic vision conditioned by his sophisticated Berlin background. Like all German musicians at the turn of the twentieth century he lived under the shadow of Richard Wagner. His relationship to Max Reger (1873–1916) was one of reverence, but he was also at times patronising, enthusiastic and impatient, fatherly and filial. Ultimately, Reger’s compositional gifts and those of other contemporary composers led Straube to a point of self-doubt and despondency. This was especially the case as, previous to Straube’s tenure, compositional creativity had always been wedded to the position of Leipzig *Thomascantor*.

Straube’s own musical gifts were mainly interpretative, gifts he in later life considered second-class. His Reger editions of 1912 and 1919 codified in minute detail an artistic perspective based on post-Wagnerian performance practice, a philosophy of performance that embodied ‘modern’ organ style. These are almost certainly Straube’s greatest achievement and of enormous value not only to the Reger scholar and performer, but to any student of late-Romantic performance practice. Perhaps contrary to expectations, ‘modern’ organ style, specifically German and ultra-Romantic, is far removed from the heavy and bombastic image associated with the person of Max Reger, but favours balance, warmth, blend and fullness of sound.

The preponderance of 8’ stops in the ‘modern’ organ provided a rich palette of foundation stops that could balance the addition of upperwork and reeds. The many different types of 8’ and 4’ stops complemented each other in their variety of harmonic structure, promoted blend and acted as bridges to other stops of their own pitch, and to higher and louder stops. The ultimate aim was to provide a seamless crescendo from *ppp* to *fff* in imitation of the Wagner orchestra. To this end Straube’s Reger editions demonstrate a comprehensive systemisation of dynamic control by means of the manipulation of Swell and Walze (see Chapters 2 and 3) together with registration by hand. In this Straube was both pioneering and classical in his exemplary use of the organ.

The editions furnish a veritable showcase of post-Wagnerian stylistic traits, more of which are discussed in Chapter 5. These include flexibility of tempo, the non-alignment of parts, detail in phrasing and articulation, and the highlighting of inner parts, all realised within a basic legato style. The close correspondence between Straube’s practice and a Wagnerian concept of sound is discussed in Chapter 4.

Hastened by World War I, changes in artistic taste and organ building fashions decreed that ‘modern’ organ style would be short-lived. Straube’s association with it

soon became an embarrassment to him. Even as he edited in the second decade of the twentieth century, his Reger editions were fast becoming obsolete. In the new organ aesthetic governed by the *Orgelbewegung* 'modern' organ style was an albatross about his neck. Attempts to dissociate himself from it include the Preface to Straube's final Reger edition, that of op. 27 (1938). Here the highly ambiguous language reflects *Orgelbewegung* ideology, and shuns 'modern' ultra-Romanticism. However, the edition itself belies this position. This is discussed in Chapter 6, as is an exposition of Straube's teaching in the early 1940s transmitted by Heinz Wunderlich thirty years later. Both are discussed in relation to 'modern' organ style and lead to the conclusion that Straube protected the style even under adverse conditions.

Musical, political and human events led to Straube's acceptance of 'resignation as a law of life' (Chapter 7). Towards the end of his life he considered his editions worthless. His disenchantment with life obliterated the achievements of his youth, of which the codification of 'modern' organ style in the Reger editions of 1912 and 1919 was his least recognised and most enduring. Straube's editions encourage us to 'read between the lines' (Reger) and go beyond the notation in order to shape our own vision of Reger's music.

