

around with severely chromatic counterpoint, has proven to be too much for many listeners (both at the time of the Concerto's premiere and later).

For all its traditional features, the Allegro moderato first movement lacks one very standard item: a solo cadenza. In this movement, Reger's tendency to extremes comes to the surface -- this is music that can move from a shattering fff or ffff climax down to a ppp whisper in just a bar or two; and there are many local climaxes, all adding up to 70 pages of hair-raising drama. The slow movement is marked Largo con gran espressione and shifts -- softly, and at first ambiguously -- from the F minor of the first movement up to F sharp. As Beethoven loved to do, Reger begins the Allegretto con spirito last movement with a phrase for the piano alone; but soon the orchestra joins, and the dance moves towards its rowdy F major conclusion.



On the one hand, Max Reger's 1910 Piano Concerto in F minor, Op. 114, is a perfectly traditional piece, even a Classical one, despite the date it bears. The orchestra employed by Reger for the work is just two horns larger than the one used by Beethoven in his celebrated "Emperor" Concerto, and the Concerto's three movements are near-textbook examples of the venerable fast-slow-fast concerto movement models. However, even though Reger did sometimes love to compose pieces that replicate music from other eras (his solo string instrument suites, for example, take the Baroque idiom in stride and bring it "up to date" as little as possible), to regard this Concerto as an outmoded, easy-to-follow museum-piece would be foolhardy. Reger's serious concert music is terribly demanding both on performer and listener -- every bit as challenging as, and in some cases more challenging (because the innovation is sometimes buried under a thick layer of tradi-

tion) than, the music being written by Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky around the same time. Reger's Piano Concerto, like his Violin Concerto of a few years earlier, is not especially well-loved music; it is rarely performed, and one hand suffices to count the number of decent recordings that have been made of it. But few of Reger's pieces allow us to see so clearly into his peculiar musical mind -- a mind tense, bent, and even fractured and yet, somehow, balanced by an overwhelming preservationist instinct.

The Concerto is scored for woodwinds in pairs, two trumpets, four horns (two more, as mentioned, than the Classical standard), timpani, strings, and, of course, pianoforte. In density and difficulty, the solo piano writing goes beyond that even of the two Johannes Brahms piano concertos, and yet, like the Brahms concertos, the style is not a demonstrative or a virtuoso one. There is simply an immense amount of information in each of the pianist's bars, and this, combined with the extent to which Reger plays

# **Max Reger**

## **Concerto For Piano And Orchestra In F**

**Rudolf Serkin, piano**  
**The Philadelphia Orchestra - Eugene Ormandy**

- I. Allegro Moderato 18:00**
- II. Largo Con Gran Espressione 10:50**
- III. Allegretto Con Spirito 8:45**

**Recorded by Columbia Records recorded March 1959**

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