

Rheinberger - Two Concertos for Organ & Orchestra (1973/2017)



Concerto in F major for Organ, String Orchestra and 3 Horns, Op. 137 01. *1st Movement – Maestoso* 02. *2nd Movement – Andante* 03. *3rd Movement – Con moto*
Concerto in G minor for Organ, String Orchestra, 2 Trumpets, 2 Horns and Timpani, Op. 177
04. *1st Movement – Grave* 05. *2nd Movement – Andante* 06. *3rd Movement – Con moto*
07. *A Mini-Discourse by E Power Biggs, part 1* 08. *A Mini-Discourse by E Power Biggs, part 2*
E. Power Biggs – organ The Columbia Symphony Maurice Peress - conductor

Joseph Rheinberger, Liechtenstein's foremost composer - I'm not necessarily sneering - was an organist from the age of seven, according to R. Gregory Capaldini's program note. When he was nineteen, the Munich Conservatory offered him a piano professorship, to which he later added posts in organ and composition, and he was the director of church music to the King of Bavaria from 1877 to 1894.

The essential impulse from which Rheinberger's music arises is lyrical rather than thrusting or dramatic, with the themes' varied rhythmic profiles providing the necessary contrast. Even the G minor concerto, after an opening theme suggesting the influence of Mozart's Italian-opera style, settles shortly into an amiable cantabile. The sense of form is unconventional, but sure; the first movement of each concerto gives the impression of a free fantasy, yet the music conveys the inevitable sense of progress of a well-constructed sonata movement, and produces the same sort of emotional fulfillment. And, for all the basic Brahmsian conservatism of the composer's idiom, there's the occasional forward-looking moment - note the way Elgar - granted, another "Brahmsian" composer - keeps trying to break through in the Andante of the Second Concerto.

These concertos display Rheinberger's keen sense of the organ's sonic possibilities. The instrument doesn't naturally blend with those in the orchestra - not even the winds, whose attack is different - but here we hear the organ and orchestra functioning now as equally

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matched partners, now as gentle antagonists in the concertante style. A particular oddity is the use of Baroque-style terraced dynamics in the solo parts: apparently the composer's instrument lacked a swell box, such as would have enabled crescendos and diminuendos. The orchestra, of course, can still make such gradual adjustments, which helps to avoid monotony. ---Stephen Francis Vasta, musicweb-international.com

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