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A CONVERSATION WITH GABRIEL KNEY ANDREW KEEGAN MACKRIELL

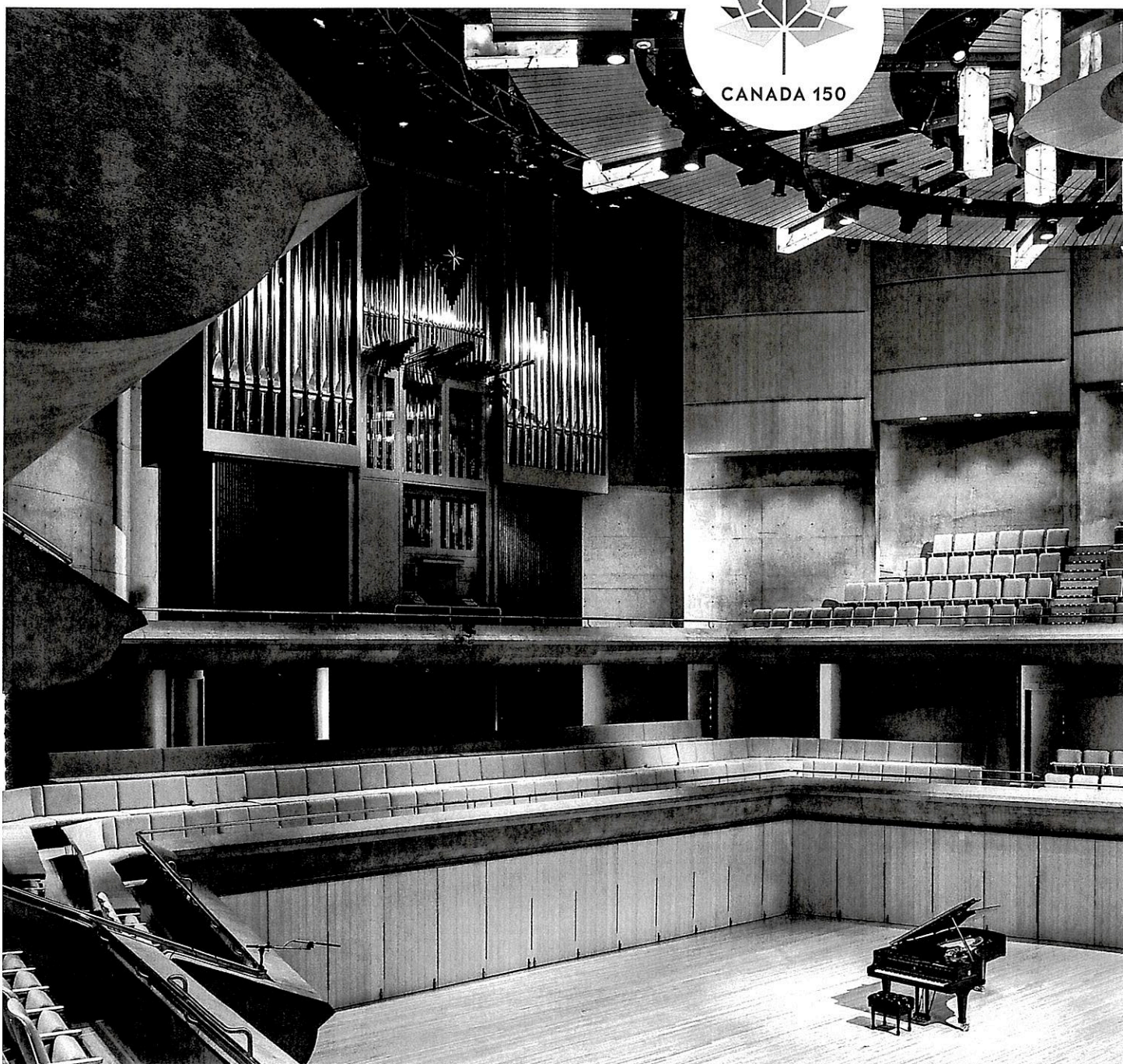
THE MAX REGER MEMORIAL ORGAN BARBARA M. REUL

ORGAN TUNING: PART 2 JOHN COENRAADS

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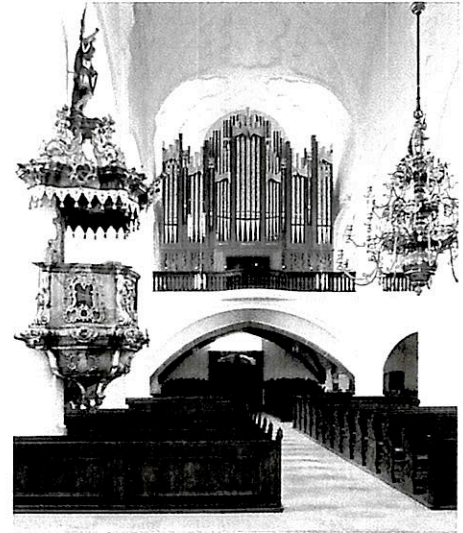
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Max Reger Memorial Organ



Days” (www.max-reger-tage.de). And for good reason: Reger returned to Weiden in 1897 after studying with Hugo Riemann in Sondershausen and Wiesbaden. For four years Reger focused on composing, including organ works, songs, and keyboard pieces. In 1901 his family moved to Munich, and he got married there a year later. In 1907 Reger accepted a professor of composition post in Leipzig and became friends with Karl Straube, organist at Leipzig’s Thomaskirche; many of Reger’s organ works were written with him in mind. In 1911 Reger was appointed conductor



“An organ that Max Reger (1873-1916) himself would have enjoyed playing on”

—The Max-Reger-Memorial Organ in Weiden (Oberpfalz), Germany

Max Reger, the famous German composer of late Romantic keyboard, chamber, choral, and orchestral works, died on 11 May 1916, i.e. 100 years ago. Despite the great number of organ pieces Reger conceived—ranging from smallish organ preludes to monumental fantasies and fugues—we find virtually no registration instructions on his part. One wonders, therefore, what kind of organ Reger had in mind and would have enjoyed playing on himself. Friedbert and Frank Weimbs, organ builders

from Hellenthal (see www.weimbs.de), pondered these questions from 2000 to 2007 while designing, building, and installing the “Max Reger Memorial organ” at St. Michael’s Church in Weiden in der Oberpfalz, where Lutherans and Catholics worshipped together until 1899.

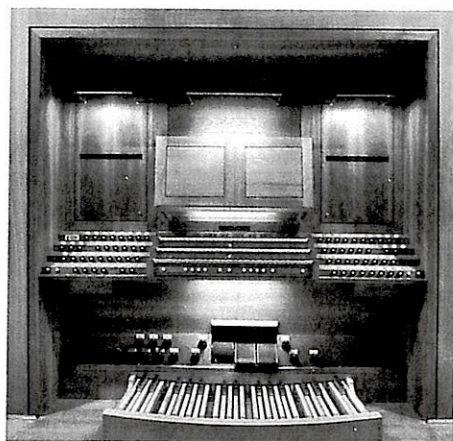
Reger, a Catholic, spent his childhood and adolescence (1874-1891) in Weiden, a charming little Renaissance town in northeastern Bavaria near the Czech border. It not only successfully markets itself as Germany’s “Max Reger Stadt”, but also hosts annual “Max Reger

of the Meiningen court orchestra, but quit in 1914 and moved to Jena, where he continued to compose and teach part-time in Leipzig. Famous for his dry sense of humour, Reger also loved to eat and drink. He died young, at age 43, in 1916.

Hanns-Friedrich Kaiser, Kirchenmusikdirektor and long-time organist at (the now Lutheran) St Michael’s Church, kindly introduced the Max Reger Memorial Organ to me on 4 July 2016 (see pictures 1-3). He emphasised that the Weimbs instrument is indeed perfectly suited for music by Reger and his contemporaries, most of all Karg-Elert, as “it can perfectly capture the multitude of musical colours and shadings that we associate with German organ music of the late

19th and early 20th centuries.” Taking inspiration from instruments built during Reger’s life time—including the Steinmeyer organ in the Berlin Weihnachtskirche whose disposition Reger approved—the instrument’s intonation, sound, playing action, and quality of craftsmanship are most impressive. It boasts 3659 pipes, 53 registers, three manuals (Hauptwerk, Schwellwerk, Positiv), a straight pedal board, a balanced mechanical playing action, and an electric stop action; a complete stop list is available from www.max-reger-orgel.de/orgel.html, and you can watch the installation on youtube as well.

According to Herr Kaiser, “playing Reger’s music without someone else present to help you achieve what he wanted is impossible even with a sequencer, at least on this organ.” My two favourite—and hands-down the



visually most attractive—stops on the organ console allow an assistant to attend to the swell pedals associated with the Schwellwerk and the Positiv while the organist attends to Reger’s other musical expectations such as playing notes with both hands and feet. When drawn fully, these two knobs look like lollypops with alternating black and cream-coloured stripes! “I can create practically every

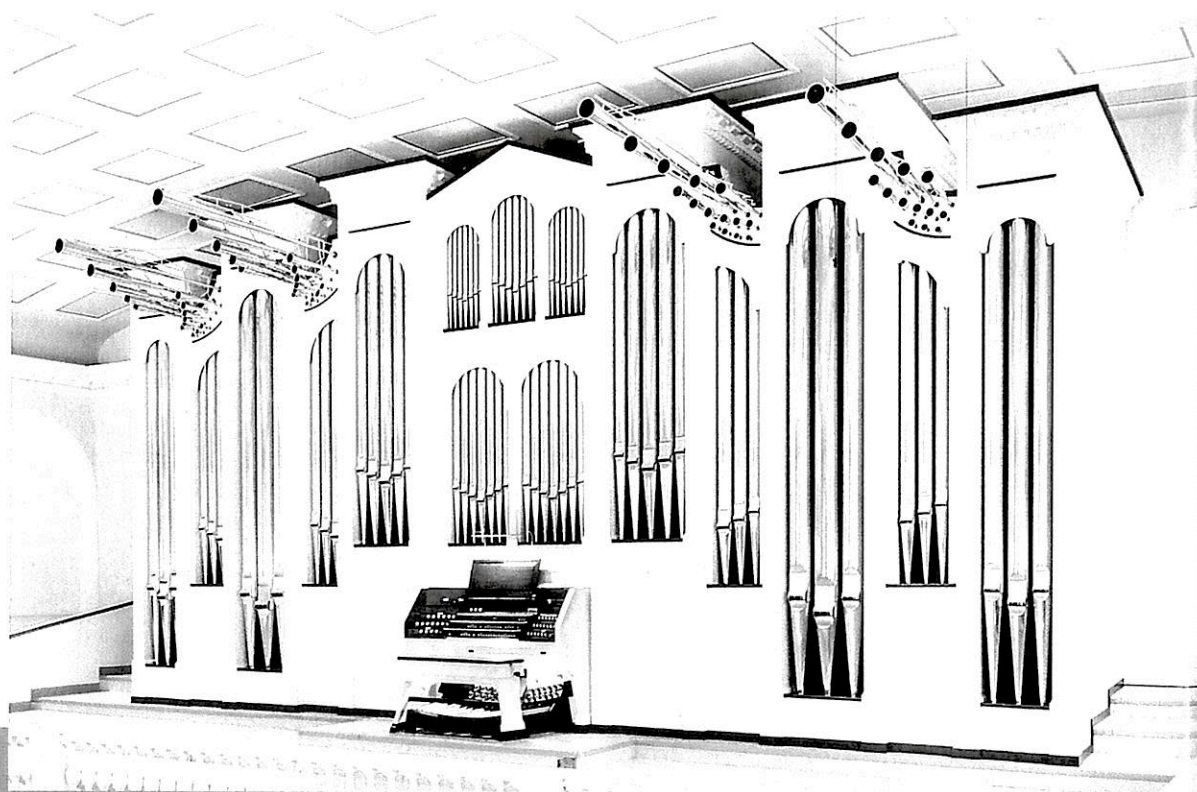
single dynamic shading from triple pianissimo to triple fortissimo”, Herr Kaiser claimed. To prove his point, he pulled no fewer than fifteen registers at the same time and played a couple of bars for me. To my amazement he never got any louder than pianissimo – until I pushed the two knobs in and the sound exploded but without overpowering the beautiful sanctuary. Amazing!

Moreover, the white keys on the three keyboards were conceived slightly wider than the black keys. This facilitates legato playing and silent finger changes, as Herr Kaiser was quick to point out. The organ is also very well suited to accompanying the congregation, choirs, and soloists, both vocal and instrumental. “My choir’s favourite Reger piece is his setting of Psalm 100”, noted Herr Kaiser. He arranged this challenging work for mixed choir, organ, and orchestra, Op. 106, for solo organ and recorded it on

opus 128 — 39 RANKS

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Reger's Prelude in C minor, WoO VIII/6, which contains seven challenging bars of organ music (an edition is available from Schott)

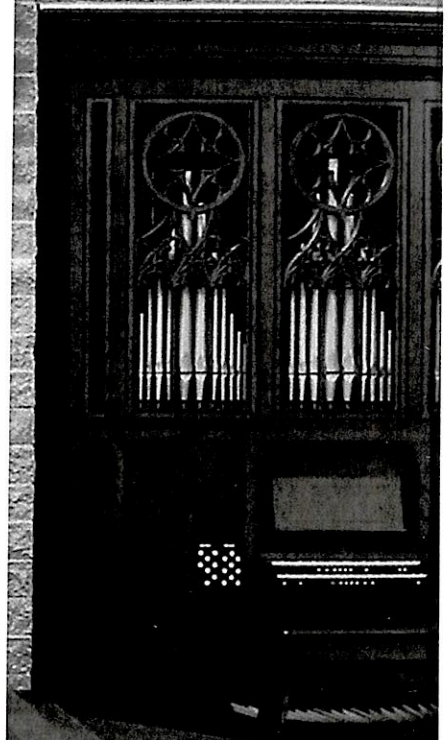
the Max Reger Memorial Organ in 2008 (see <http://www.max-reger-orgel.de/cds.html>).

When I asked my host which pieces by Reger he would specifically recommend to Canadian organists, Herr Kaiser quipped “everything!”. I replied “How about a piece with a good story attached?” My favourite one is Reger’s so-called “Limonadenpräludivium” (Lemonade Prelude). Its story was first shared with me by archivist Petra Vorsatz, a well-known Reger scholar and head of the local museum which is right next to St. Michael’s Church. The museum is worth a visit, as it includes the “Max Reger Zimmer” (the actual room where he received his first music lessons), a small but lovely collection of autographs, interesting memorabilia, and even the console of the small, two-manual organ he played as a youngster in Weiden. Reger jotted down this short composition while visiting the apartment of his first music teacher and mentor Adalbert Lindner in Weiden on 22 August 1900. Having leafed through a number of copies of organ pieces by various contemporary masters, Reger remarked, “There’s not much that’s decent in it. I’ll write you something else for it. But it will cost you a fine lemonade!” The result: Reger’s Prelude in C minor, WoO VIII/6, which contains seven challenging bars of organ music (see Picture 4; an edition is available from Schott). At the bottom of the page, Reger added a possible fugue theme; on the back of the page there is another, unattributed piece of organ music, notated by Lindner.

Finally, when I inquired whether Herr Kaiser was a “Reger only” kind of organist, he laughed and admitted that in 2017 (when Lutherans around the world will commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation), he was going to play as little Reger as possible! Given the latter’s love of Bach, whom he considered the “beginning and end of all music”, that sounds like a great idea to me. I am also positive that, for obvious reasons, Reger would have very much enjoyed playing the Weimbs organ at St. Michael’s Church in his—and, incidentally, also my own—former home town of Weiden.

—BARBARA M. REUL

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