

Die Niederlande und Deutschland um 1900

While it was usual during the period of 1600 for German organ students from to travel to The Netherlands in order to study with Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, 300 hundred years later it would turn the other way around. Attracted by the music of Brahms, Reger and other great composers of the late romantic organ tradition, Dutch composers and performers of the instrument would travel to Germany and Austria to study, and some of them would find work and resettle there.

The 19th century was the century of nationalism, fatherland, flag waving and the national anthem; the majority of the national anthems of various countries date from this period, the only rare exception being the Dutch anthem 'Wilhelmus'.

This patriotic tendency also left its tracks in art music, of which Smetana's *Ma Vlast* ('My Fatherland') and Sibelius' *Finlandia* are perhaps the most famous examples. That JAN WILLEM BRANDTS BUYS was referring to Holland with his composition 'Patria' and not his second fatherland, Austria (where he met Grieg and Brahms, and enjoyed much success with his operas), is clear from the Wilhelmus thematic material that regularly appears throughout, – from the beginning of the piece, but also the last page in which the opening of the *Abgesang* ('a Prince of Orange') appears. Evidently the 'Sehnsucht nach Holland', which Brandts Buys mentioned during melancholic moments found a musical outlet for expressing his sentiments.

München 17.12.1901. The Sonata is finally finished! Hurrah! – as MAX REGER writes in a letter to Martin Krause, to whom he dedicated the Sonata opus 60. Not only this shout of relief, but also statements found in various letters make it clear that Reger felt he had worked longer than usual on the piece ('...daß ich immer und immer an dem Werke feile.'). He found the use of the classic sonata form problematic to deal with, which is why he preferred to title the first section *Improvisation*. Nonetheless, this section really is a main form with the exposition of 2 themes, development and a recapitulation. The development in any case is rather abridged: a very soft interlude ending in an almost inaudible *pppp*, directly after which the repeat of the main theme starts *allegro con brio*. The whole is typified by a harmonic complexity in which the rules of classical harmony are stretched to their limits. It seems Reger shared Liszt's opinion that it should be possible for each chord to have a harmonic relationship with any other chord, which is an unusual premise. Whatever the case may be, Reger's opus 60 certainly belongs to the most modern sounding of Reger's compositions. Some Schönberg followers even consider that this composition borders on being classified as twelve-tone music. Indeed, it is not difficult to find twelve-tone structures in the atonal sounding chromaticism of many fragments in the expressive *Invokation*. It begins softly and plaintively, (*Grave con duolo*), but swells to an imposing call to the heavens. Evidently this prayer is heard as the choral 'Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her' can be heard answering as if from afar. In actuality, the sonata is in four parts; the *Introduktion* preceding the fugue is itself virtually an independent unit (comparable to the scherzo in a classical symphony), in which the composer uses motifs from both previous movements, but also sets out elements for the fugue that will follow. The fugue is clearly and classically structured with the usual thematic structure, divertimenti (with an unusual staccato motif) and a stretto. In then last measures, Reger tries to illustrate that 'every chord can follow the other', finally ending in a shining D-Major chord.

GERARD BUNK was born in Rotterdam, where he had organ lessons with Johan Besselaar for a short period. (Besselaar was once organist of the Laurenskerk and the organ advisor during the building of the Walcker organ in de Zuiderkerk). In 1906 Bunk studied piano in Hamburg; apart from this he was for the most part self-educated. Barely 20 years old, he was appointed teacher of piano and music theory in Bielefeld (Westfalen) and in 1910 he replaced Karl Straube in a concert performance with Reger in Dortmund, which marked the beginning of a new carrier as organist, choir director and composer. In 1925 he was appointed organist of the Reinoldikirche in Dortmund with its large Walcker organ comprising 105 registers, 5 keyboards and pedal.

Highly valued by Widor, Reger, Straube and Schweitzer, Bunk was largely forgotten. Even the music reference books such as *MGG* and *Grove's* ignore his existence. As a consequence of the style change during 1930'a with the *Orgelbewegung* and organ music inspired by Renaissance stylistic elements such as exemplified by Hugo Distler, the late romantic organ style and the corresponding instruments fell into discredit. (Bunk himself intensely disliked the sparse music based on fifths and fourths from this period). During recent years however, his compositions are enjoying the renewed

attention of the public. Perhaps having entered the 21st century we have a better view of his position within the context of music history. For those who are interested, much information can be found on the website of the Gerard Bunk-Gesellschaft (www.gerardbunk.de).

The *Legende* opus 29 is a composition from his youth (1908) with a clearly personal style. Albert Schweitzer called it a 'valuable union of the style of Felix Mendelssohn and César Franck'. As the title suggests, the *Legende* is pure programmatic music, a kind of symphonic poem. A story is told in various episodes; a beginning full of expectation, a fairytale *Allegretto*, a soft yet threatening *Tempo di Marcia* etc. On the last page (*Wie im Anfang*) these elements reappear in an echo that dies away softly. Perhaps I shouldn't say it, but I can really imagine the *Legende* sounding magnificent on a theater organ. The question would be, who will make the film that fits this music?!

Of all the romantic composers, JOHANNES BRAHMS is the grand master when it pertains to the perfect control of polyphonic elements. Where many composers supply a closing fugue as a necessary drudgery of a required form, Brahms in the same situation is fully in his element. This formalistic polyphony is never created at the cost of expressivity (even the exceptionally beautiful beginning of his motet *Warum ist das Licht gegeben* is written in a strict canonic style).

The organ fugue, partly due to the use of the highly colored (and finger 'unfriendly') tonality of a-flat minor, has a mild and warm sound. The theme appears in two versions: normal and inverted, in which all the intervals are mirrored:

Theme

Inversion

SAMUEL DE LANGE jr. received part of his training in Vienna with Alexander Winterberger, a former pupil of Liszt's. He later worked in Rotterdam as a director of the Toonkunstkoor, as well as in Cologne and Stuttgart. His 5th Sonata was dedicated to Johannes Brahms. More than Reger, De Lange applies the sonata form in a freer manner. The first part begins with an exposition of two contrasting elements: a long toccata-like 1st theme group and a short, more melodious 2nd theme with an accompaniment in sixtets. The development is a long, spun out 'improvisation', almost exclusively with thematic material from the second theme, hereafter only the first theme is used for the most 'Brahmsian' sound is part II, written in 'exchangeable counterpoint' which pertains to the fact that the voices can be exchanged (soprano to bass for instance) without the composition losing its sound or sense. In this case, there are three melodies (a, b en c; also in the embellished version: a', b', c'), which follow the plan below:

	measure 1-8	measure 9-16	measure 17-26	measure 27-34
right hand:	a	b		a'
left hand:	b	a	(bridge)	c'
pedal:	c	c		b'

The *Finale* is a fugue with toccata-like sections and ending. The imposing opening begins with a fugue theme, using the minor 7th, occasionally inverted, even though the composer doesn't achieve the level of the man to whom he dedicated the piece *in inniger Verehrung*!

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(translation Ted Diehl)