

Reger Festival

It was a great honour to play the wonderful Suite for Solo Viola No 1 in G minor and the Piano Trio No 1 at the Reger Festival of Birmingham Conservatoire. In this interesting Piano Trio, Reger chose to employ the viola as the lower line of the strings, rather than the more traditional cello.

The Piano Trio No 1 is the second work that Reger wrote and, overall, the piece sounds very passionate and full of elements of Brahms. A movement that springs to mind immediately is the third and final movement which takes the form of a theme and five variations, and the rhapsodic last variation has an interesting calm ending to this passionate movement. A very slow tempo with intricate rhythms provided plenty of difficulties for our ensemble, and we spent a lot of time just practising this slow movement in a steady tempo with extremely clear pulse.

Rhythmically too, the third movement's first variation was difficult for me - the viola part has the first down-beat of the variation, yet the piano sets the tempo with the following three semiquavers, having a semiquaver rest on the down-beat. It is a massively confusing for the violist in that the first sounding semiquaver in the piano part is a very low bass note, following by a treble note and then the bass note again. We spent a lot of time practising this in different ways. For instance, we tried to make things come together by not sounding the bass note in the piano part, so the piano part would sound like a quaver with a quaver rest on the down beat. That was helpful and eventually we could incorporate the musical ideas based on achieving accurate rhythms.

In comparison to the early trio, the G minor Suite was one of Reger's last works. It is such a wonderful piece to play. From listening to the third suite, I found that the structure of this first suite and the third suite is similar: slow movement – fast dance-like movement – slow peaceful movement – fast dramatic ending movement. And they are both in minor keys too.

The second movement of the first suite is great fun to play, but at the same time it is very difficult to make it sound good: the intonation of the double stops and the articulation at the very beginning were particularly taxing. Slow practice helped me a lot with these. I found that good intonation and musicality are required by the third movement, but even after focusing on these elements, I still found it difficult to make it sound good. The fingerings for the double stops are connected a lot with the phrasing. If sometimes you

choose the easier way, playing one note against an open string, it is very difficult to make those two notes sound even. So I had to change position without breaking the phrasing to avoid the open strings - which I found very difficult to manage.

The final movement is filled with semiquavers. It seems that it is the easiest movement to play, but it is actually very difficult to perform it properly. I had to analyze it very carefully, so I knew where the phrases were. And physically, I got a lot of tension from playing it. I even went to see a doctor because of this movement! But, at last, by moving around my left arm, I finally found a way to release some of the tension.

Although there were many difficulties during the rehearsals and practices, Reger's music is surely great fun to play!

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