

JOSEF RHEINBERGER
1839-1901

Fantasia-Sonata in A-Flat, Op. 65

Like Brahms, Rheinberger was a traditionalist, a composer of “absolute” music. His more than 200 works exhibit a relatively restricted formal palette; yet his harmonies, melodies, and musical exuberance are refreshing. His organ music displays a clarity contrasting with the dense, highly chromatic style of such contemporaries as Max Reger and Louis Vierne. There is a certain nobility in the grandeur of the *Fantasia-Sonata*, owing perhaps in part to its rather “dark” key of A-flat. The outer movements contribute to the Fantasy namesake; the first movement is essentially a customized sonata form lacking a second theme and development section, and the third movement is a fugue punctuated by brief reminders of themes from the other movements. The Grave-Allegro begins outright with the main motto in a fanfare-type treatment, before proceeding into the movement proper. The second movement is of typical Rheinbergerian beauty. The Fugue begins with a “normal” exposition, after which the main theme of the first movement returns in an even more fantasy-like treatment than before. This section reaches a climax, after which there is a brief look back at the second movement. The Fugue then returns, this time in the relative minor and exploring more distant chromaticism before finally landing back into A-flat and finishing in Rheinberger’s typical triadic style, including a plagal cadence.