

Pouring out Arrogant Words:
Extra-Musical Meaning in Reubke's *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm*.

The music of Julius Reubke springs from a rich tradition of affect in Romantic composition. As a student of Franz Liszt, he was exposed to the emotions painted in symphonic poems. His studies in Weimar also brought him into extensive contact with the Wagner's idea of *leitmotiv* and Berlioz's *idée fixe*. Reubke learned the importance of sound as it is organized to express meaning in music. After writing his *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm*, Reubke was well on his way to establishing himself as an important figure in keyboard composition, a reputation that surely would have been more fully substantiated had he lived beyond the age of twenty-four. In this piece, his abilities in programmatic composition are most skillfully demonstrated. Reubke's treatment of the organ in this, his most famous work, adeptly characterizes the words and sentiments of the 94th Psalm, without actually using the text in the piece. It is in his opening motive, and the measures that follow, the meaning of the text is expressed by the development that continues throughout the work.

Very little analytical attention has been given to the *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* (even in languages other than English), nor really to programmatic organ music in general.¹ According to musicologist and organist Harvey Grace, the genre of solo organ work is even blatantly ignored. He cites, as an example, the entry in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* dedicated to Felix Mendelssohn, which goes for many pages and yet barely touches on Mendelssohn's very important organ compositions work.

¹ Harvey Grace, "Church and Organ Music. Programme Music for the Organ (Continued)," *The Musical Times* 59, no. 905 (Jul. 1, 1918), 303-306.

With this in mind, it is not surprising that little attention has been paid to the short life of Julius Reubke outside of the conversations of performance cannon for organists. There are a few significant scholarly contributions, however, the most significant being those from Daniel Chorzempa, a keyboardist from Minnesota whose dissertation, *Julius Reubke, Life and Works*, is a significant gift to the field. However, it does not focus solely on the organ sonata, and when the piece is discussed the programmatic elements are only lightly dealt with, but as he himself mentions, “an understanding of the *Sonata* is incomplete without the programmatic side of it.”² Other scholars, such as Harvey Grace and Michael Gailit, are willing to tackle the programmatic elements of the *Organ Sonata*, but have done so in relatively small journal articles.³ In this analysis of the *Organ Sonata*, I hope to bring together the contributions of previous scholars of the piece and add to them my own analysis of Reubke’s methods of conveying extra-musical meaning.

Friedrich Julius Reubke’s short life began on March 23, 1834 in Hausneindorf, Germany. He was born to Elise Wiederhold and Christian Adolf Reubke, who became a prominent organ builder in 1839 after reading, *Die Orgellbaukunst*,⁴ a ‘how-to’ book that he found particularly inspiring.⁵ Julius Reubke and his brothers, Carl Ludwig Gebhardt Otto (1842- 1913) and Carl Ludwig Emil (1836-1886),⁶ were raised Protestant and were schooled by the local cantor, which holds significance for Reubke’s understanding of the psalms. All three children were musically talented to some degree, Emil joining his father

² Daniel Chorzempa, *Julius Reubke, Life and Works*, (1971), 254.

³ Gailit has, in fact, published a book, *Julius Reubke: The Life and Works*, but it is in German. There is one other full-length book by Gerdi Troskie on the matter, also in German and one completely unavailable English-language dissertation by Harriette Anne Slack, focusing exclusively on the *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm*.

⁴ Written by J.G. Töpfer and published in 1833.

⁵ Julius Reubke, *The Complete Organ Works*, ed. Wayne Leupold, 6 vols., (Melville, N.Y.: McAfee Music Corp.; 1978), 2.

⁶ *ibid.*, 3.

in the organ business in 1860 to form ‘*Reubke und Sohn*.’⁷ Otto was, according to Liszt an “eminent organist and pianist.” After Julius’s death, Otto was the editor for the first published edition of the *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm*.⁸ He wrote five pieces himself, although none amount to more than skillful studies of Schumann.⁹

As Julius Reubke grew older and his skills became apparent, his parents sent him to Quedlinberg to study with Hermann Bönicke (1821-1879), who, it turns out, was better at the theory of composition than the practice of it.¹⁰ Reubke stayed there until 1851 when he went to Berlin to study at Royal Music Director, Julius Stern’s “Konservatorium der musik,” which had been founded as the “Musikschule für Gesand, Klavier und Komposition” the year before. It was the first private music school in Berlin and Reubke came to study piano and composition. Berlin at the time had few strong professional musicians, and although that made for a difficult musical environment at times, it also left ample room for developing students like Reubke. Chorzewa suggests that Berlin became “the promised land for the second class musicians and composers,”¹¹ and in this setting, Reubke found the freedom to test his skills.

Reubke studied composition with Adolf Bernard Marx (1795-1866), who was considered a *ton-dichter*, or tone poet. He was adept at showing “the power of music to express feeling” and defended music “against mere academicism.”¹² Reubke learned valuable lessons in expressions from Marx who, according to organist Michael Gailit, “was very much involved with the psychological side of music, the expression of emotional

⁷ Emil continued the company after Adolf’s death in 1875 and went on to develop the first German pneumatic organ.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Chorzewa, *Julius Reubke, Life and Works*, 27.

¹⁰ Reubke, *The Complete Organ Works*, 4.

¹¹ Chorzewa, *Julius Reubke, Life and Works*, 50.

¹² *ibid.*, 55.

states in composition, and the effects on the listener.”¹³ By the time Reubke left in 1856, he had composed two serious works that survive today (undoubtedly there are others that have not survived): *Mazurka* and the *Scherzo*. These pieces, in addition to his *Trio*, (which he published in 1848 at an impressively young age), comprise the whole of the works that survive from his years before his studies with Liszt.

During his studies with Marx, Reubke attracted the attention of several noted musicians. Hans von Bülow, a close friend of both Reubke and Liszt’s, wrote to Liszt on December 12, 1853, recommending the budding composer as a potential student. He commented that Reubke was “the best student in the conservatory, who possesses great abilities as a composer and interpreter.”¹⁴ Reubke did eventually become Liszt’s pupil and went to study with him in Weimar in 1856. It was there that Reubke became fully immersed in what was known as the *neudeutsche* (Neo-German) school—the music of the “triumvirate,” Berlioz, Liszt’s and Wagner, that was distinctly unique from the music of Schumann and Mendelssohn.¹⁵

These composers developed distinct ways to convey extra-musical meaning that became characteristic of the time. Berlioz’s *idée fixe* is clearly reflected in his *Symphonie Fantastique*, in which the love theme returns again and again, each time transformed to match the mood and situation. The same can be said for Wagner’s *leitmotiv*, which is so effectively used throughout his *Ring Cycle* to represent objects, characters, emotions and plotlines. Reubke also took careful note of Liszt’s style that gave rise to the symphonic poems and, in fact, Reubke was the first to use these concepts in the context of organ

¹³ Michael Gailit, "Julius Reubke and His Organ Sonata, the 94th Psalm, Part 1," *The Diapason* 83, no. 1 (1992/01/00/January; January, 1992; 1992), 12.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 12.

¹⁵ Chorzempa, *Julius Reubke, Life and Works*, 77.

music.¹⁶ Chorzempa comments that “considering the incredible speed with which he absorbed the Lisztian style of composition, the intensity of contact between the two was undoubtedly very great.”¹⁷ Because of the intensity of his studies, Reubke would have been quite familiar with all of these practices and would have been well instructed in their creation and use in his own music.

Reubke was a masterful composition student and excelled at Weimar. Richard Pohl, a poet and mutual friend of Reubke and Liszt, noted that Reubke was “one of the favorites of his master Liszt; and he earned this honor completely.”¹⁸ The quality of Reubke’s compositions improved significantly under the tutelage of Liszt and his next major work *Piano Sonata* demonstrates his improvement. Both the *Piano Sonata* and the *Organ Sonata* were completed in a relatively short time and were premiered in early and mid-1857, respectively. His organ sonata was dedicated to Carl Riedel, a friend of Reubke’s from Leipzig. Reubke was invited to premiere the *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* in Merseburg June 17, 1857 on an organ that was well suited for the piece, although there is no way of knowing if it was the sound from this organ that the composer originally had in mind.¹⁹ The performance was very well received as Karl Franz Brendel, the editor of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* at the time, commented: “There can be no doubt of his decisive, outstanding capability as a composer and as a performer. Distinguishing are the wealth of imagination and the great freshness of invention.”²⁰ This was the only published review of Reubke’s sonata work in his lifetime.

¹⁶ Gailit, *Julius Reubke and His Organ Sonata, the 94th Psalm, Part 1*, 12.

¹⁷ Chorzempa, *Julius Reubke, Life and Works*, 84.

¹⁸ Gailit, *Julius Reubke and His Organ Sonata, the 94th Psalm, Part 1*, 13.

¹⁹ Organs vary a great deal in the sounds they produce and this can have a dramatic effect on how any given piece is experienced in performance.

²⁰ Chorzempa, *Julius Reubke, Life and Works*, 102.

With the success of his sonatas, Reubke had in mind to write an opera, but he needed the funds to do it. With a lack of financial support in Weimar, where Liszt was running into some trouble maintaining his popularity, Reubke moved to Dresden December 1857 to become a member of the *Dresdner ton Künstlelerversin* (founded in 1854) whose mission was to promote the “cultivation of classical and contemporary music and supporting local musicians.”²¹ Reubke had long been suffering from what is now believed to have been tuberculosis. While resting in the nearby village, Pillnetz, he died on the evening of June 3, 1858 and was buried four days later.²² The burial book at the church *Maria am Wasser* says “cause of death: Lung attack.”²³ Upon Reubke’s death, friend, composer and personal secretary to Liszt, Peter Cornelius (1824-1874) wrote a tribute poem, which he later personally delivered to Adolf Reubke in Hausneindorf, for a memorial service held in Weimar:

Beim Tode von Julius Reubke

Peter Cornelius

Nicht mit dem Tode rechten
Will unser Klagelied,
Den Kranz nur will es flechten
Dem Freund, der von uns schied.

Den zwifach unser Leben
Und unsre Kunst verlor,
Der trau uns war ergeben,
Den sich die Kunst erkor.

Er trug in zarter Hülle,
Im Körper krank und schwach,
Zu mächt'ger Glut Fülle,
Die des Gefäss zerbrach.

In edelstem Gemüte
Zeigt er des Em'gen Spur,
Sein Herz war eine Blüte
Voll Duft und Schimmer nur.

Geweist durch Gestesschöne
Und schöpferische Kraft,
Verhiess die Kunst der Töne
Ihn frühe Meisterschaft.

Er wollte nicht mit Vielen
Auf bemitteltet'ner Bahn,
Er stieg zu neuen Zielen
Auf stillem Pfad hinan.

Er kannte kein Gelingen
Er strebte nicht nach Lobt
Ein unablässig Ringen
War, was die Brust ihm hob.

Und wird mit ihm zerrieben,
Wes er im Kampf errang:
Sein Hoffen, Sehnen, Lieben,
Gestaltet im Gesang?

Wird dem, was ihm gelungen
Und dem, was er gewollt,
Ein Ehrenkranz geschlungen,
Bewund'rung noch gezollt?...

Doch ob der Welt sein Streben,
Ob es ihr nicht bewusst,
Er lebt ein Ruhmesleben
In seiner Freunde Brust.

Sein Eifer ohnegleichen
Hält noch im Tode Schritt,
Wenn Schönes wir erreichen,
Sein Geist erreicht es mit.

Wah', dass in frühem Leiden
Der Tod ihn hingerafft,
Wah', dass er musste scheiden
Voll Tatendrang und Kraft.

Doch Heil ihm, fern dem Wehe
Der Welt und ihrer Gunst,
Vergänglichliches verwehe,
Doch ewig ist die Kunst.

²¹ *ibid.*, 112.

²² Reubke, *The Complete Organ Works*, 8.

²³ Gailit, *Julius Reubke and His Organ Sonata, the 94th Psalm, Part 1*, 14.

Liszt also expressed his condolences to Adolf saying:

Dear Sir,

Allow me to add these few lines of deepest sympathy to the poem by Cornelius, ["Bein Tode von Julius Reubke" ("On the Death of Julius Reubke")] which lends such fitting words to our feelings of sorrow. Truly no one could feel more deeply the loss which Art has suffered in your Julius, than the one who has followed with admiring sympathy his noble, constant, and successful strivings in these latter years, and who will ever bear his friendship faithfully in mind--the one who signs himself with great esteem

Yours most truly,

F. Liszt

Weimar, June 10th, 1858²⁴

Reubke's death was mourned by many others as well. Pohl wrote an obituary in the

Neue Zeitschrift für Musik:

Pitiless Death has again snatched away one in the prime of his youth, one of those whose artistic future we saw rising so promisingly before us. The world new little as yet of him, for he had to die in the middle of his first labor. But we have not many to lose, who are of his quality in such young years. Had he been permitted to remain with us, his name would have become one of the most respected, and the world of artists would have bemoaned his loss as deeply as can only his friends now. He was one of the favorites of his master Liszt, and he earned this distinction in the fullest—that is the finest laurel which we can place on his casket.²⁵

To this moving testimony, Hans von Bülow responded: "Reubke's death was really a very lamentable loss; such wonderful, fresh hope shattered, such splendid vigor cut down. Death is a monstrous Bonipartist!"²⁶ Unfortunately, the original autographed manuscript of the *Organ Sonata* was lost, leaving analysts to rely on the edition published in 1871 by Julius Schuberth and edited by Otto Reubke.²⁷

In light of his early death, Reubke's *Organ Sonata* is not only significant as his last composed piece, but it is also a window into his ideas about text painting in the context of instrumental programmatic music. Perhaps his thoughts on this matter would have been more fully explored in future works, but as it is, the *Organ Sonata* provides a wealth of material. To my knowledge and extensive searching, no one else has composed an

²⁴ Chorzempa, *Julius Reubke, Life and Works*, 121.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 123.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ Reubke, *The Complete Organ Works*, 8.

instrumental piece based on the 94th Psalm and even vocal works are scarce. This is partially because Enlightenment philosophy downplayed the role of the church and its music, which contributed to the decline of organ music in general. Certainly, there have never been organ pieces devoted to this specific psalm, which might have posed compositional difficulties due to a lack of precedent.

Most religious organ works available during Reubke's lifetime consisted of preludes or postludes to choral music and very little relates to the text in a direct way. Chorzempa divides psalm setting into three categories: vocal settings, instrumental setting modeled after those choral works, and "programmatic settings without any vocal model."²⁸ Furthermore, he claims that in his research, "the only example of the last category is Reubke's *94th Psalm Organ Sonata*." In breaking new ground, Reubke would have had to take inspiration from the conventions of other instrumental music, or from the above mentioned choral preludes, particularly those of Bach.

In looking back to the organ-rich Baroque era, Reubke would have been inspired by the concept of "affektenlehre," the idea that music can illicit specific emotions through musical gesture. The idea that this emotional response is largely involuntary on the part of the listener is significant when viewing expression in the context of programmatic music. Keeping with this philosophy would require Reubke to compose his sonata in such a way that the listener could not help but to feel the emotions of the text. To help with this challenge, Reubke would have also looked toward Gerog Joseph (Abbé) Vogler (1749-1814), who was highly influenced by the Mannheim School's exploration into dynamic effect, particularly as it related to its psychological and emotional effects. His technical innovations for the organ made many of Reubke's gestures possible. Vogler was also apt to

²⁸ Chorzempa, *Julius Reubke, Life and Works*, 236.

use programmatic titles for his works and from this sprang a desire to express a broad range of colors through organ music.²⁹ Reubke's *Organ Sonata* reflects both these innovations in timbre and the perceptive use of dynamics.

Reubke also would have undoubtedly been influenced by the organ works of Mendelssohn who is considered by many, such as Chorzewski, to have "founded the genre of the Romantic organ sonata."³⁰ These works expand the emotional potential of the instrument and take the first steps towards making the organ a concert instrument, rather than its being confined to church services. In addition to Mendelssohn, Reubke would certainly have absorbed many of the techniques of his teacher Liszt, whose style often greatly differed from that of Mendelssohn. Liszt was a champion of Romantic ideals and he began seriously applying that philosophy to his organ compositions in Weimar. Liszt's most famous organ work, *Ad Nos, ad Salutarem*, best compares as being a major influence in Reubke's *94th Psalm*. Liszt's writing was limited by his abilities at the organ and it was at this point that Reubke had the advantage, being a skillful organist himself. Both pieces use motives of minor seconds and minor thirds with occasional leaps and Reubke also adapts Liszt's use of crossing hands.

Before delving into the meaning of Reubke's work, an analysis of the *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* is helpful in orienting the discussion. Despite the obvious programmatic themes suggested by the title and the opening affect marking "*düster*" (darkly), the work can also be admired from a purely musical standpoint. The piece as a whole is in c-minor, which has been considered a key of heroic struggle since Beethoven's time,³¹ but musicologist Harvey Grace asserts "considered as pure music, the Reubke Sonata is so

²⁹ *ibid.*, 141.

³⁰ *ibid.*, 145.

³¹ Edward Arthur Lippman, "Symbolism in Music," *The Musical Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (Oct., 1953), 572.

satisfactory that many of us concern ourselves little with its dramatic basis.”³² I feel that to do this is a mistake that ignores a major aspect of the piece, but for now I will, in fact, deal with the technical aspects of the sonata to form a foundation with which to discuss the program below.



Figure 1. Julius Reubke, *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* mm. 1-5.

Understanding the piece’s main motive is essential to grasping the *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* as a whole (Figure 1). From the down beat, the motive carefully incorporates the minor seconds and minor thirds mentioned above and includes a distinctive descending line, which according to Gailit, “can be interpreted as the thematic source of all the step-wise proceeding lines in the work.”³³ Although this seems a very broad statement to me, it does appear that when descending lines do emerge in the score they are interconnected with this first statement. At the time the *Organ Sonata* was composed, Liszt had used similar minor second/third gestures to express tension and emotion.³⁴ This motive makes up the large portion of the piece and returns time and again in various permutations. This use of a recurring theme is similar in principle to Berlioz’s *idée fixe*, a concept which Liszt admired and would have taught to Reubke.

³² Harvey Grace, "Church and Organ Music. Programme Music for the Organ (Concluded)," *The Musical Times* 59, no. 906 (Aug. 1, 1918), 352.

³³ Michael Gailit, "Julius Reubke and His Organ Sonata: The 94th Psalm, Part 2," *The Diapason* 83, no. 2 (February, 1992), 11)

³⁴ *ibid.*

The first two measures of Reubke's sonata are semi-symmetrical in that there are similar intervals on either side of a tritone leap. These intervals are used seven times in the first two measures. Another significant observation into the characteristics of the main motive is that it begins with nine consecutive chromatic notes without ever repeating, which remarkably pushes the boundaries of chromaticism and enters the realm of serialism, foreshadowing the 12-tone rows of the twentieth century. Furthermore, throughout the sonata, iii harmonies replace the dominant, which serves to loosen the tonal structure and rigidity of the piece. This practice stems from a tradition established by Beethoven, Liszt, and Wagner and these techniques are the "seed of tonal spread and the destruction of tonality."³⁵ For Reubke, it is one more example of his progressive thinking that makes him distinctive as a composer.

In further examining Reubke's motives, we note that the rhythmic gestures of first two measures continue throughout the piece regardless of pitch and so also act as their own motive. Chorzempa mentions that this rhythmic gesture is "a powerful motive due to the delayed entrance of the short note, which renders an accent to the following note, although the heavy accent of the measure might well be on the first note."³⁶ The rhythm appears in later measures as tension is building (Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 2. Julius Reubke, *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* mm. 16-17.

³⁵ Chorzempa, *Julius Reubke, Life and Works*, 221.

³⁶ Chorzempa, *Julius Reubke, Life and Works*, 193.



Figure 3. Julius Reubke, *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* mm. 181-182.

Chorzempa also claims that the main theme in measures 1 and 2 is in Bar form (AAB), which he defines as “repetition of an idea followed by a conclusion.”³⁷ He establishes the two *Stollen* (A sections) as being separated by tritone leap and the descending line as the *Abgesang* (B section). I have to disagree with this analysis because I do not feel there is enough thematic material in the first two measures to merit its being labeled as a repeat, particularly when only both A sections put together equal the length of the B section.

More than simply acting as a component of the title, sonata does actually loosely represent the form of the piece. The piece is found in three movements, the first two of which adhere to sonata form, albeit not a traditionally strict sonata-allegro form as might have been written by Mozart, but rather of the more free forms found in the Romantic era. One particularly interesting element of Reubke’s form is that the themes are partially developed immediately after they are introduced and so there is development of the first theme before the second is stated at all. According to Gailit, the first movement is divided with the Theme 1 material (Figure 1) running to measure 53 at which point Theme 2 enters (Figure 4).³⁸ The full development section begins at m. 108 followed by the recapitulation

³⁷ *ibid.*, 185.

³⁸ Gailit, *Julius Reubke and His Organ Sonata: The 94th Psalm, Part 2*, 11.

(m.171) and the coda (m. 203). These elements give the movement the structure it needs to be considered a sonata.



Figure 4. Julius Reubke, *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* mm. 53-56.

Again, I feel that the theme demarcations that Gailit makes are somewhat ambiguous in their nature, but this also fits with the styles of composition of the time. Also, true to the trends that began with Beethoven, the first movement runs directly into the second movement, pausing briefly at a fermata to establish a Bb-minor tonality, a key that, according to Chorzempa, seemed “traditionally dark and somber” to Romantic composers like Liszt and Chopin.³⁹

The a-minor second movement, also in sonata form, introduces Theme 1 right away in m. 233, which carries the same rhythmic motive as Theme 1 of the first movement, (Figure 5). After developing this motive, Reubke introduces Theme 2 in m. 243 with a deceptive cadence rather than the expected e-minor chord (Figure 6), which brings the key back to a-minor.⁴⁰ This is followed by the development section in m. 254, but it is unique in that it only addresses the first theme. Instead of exploring the second theme, Reubke returns to his main motive and further develops it. From the recapitulation of the second movement, which is found in m. 272, Reubke moves directly in to the third movement, which is a fugue—based again on the original motive of the piece (Figure 7). This time

³⁹ Chorzempa, *Julius Reubke, Life and Works*, 193.

⁴⁰ Gailit, *Julius Reubke and His Organ Sonata: The 94th Psalm, Part 2*, 11.

however, the B section of minor seconds are ascending rather than descending, the implications of which are discussed below.



Figure 5. Julius Reubke, *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* mm. 233-237.

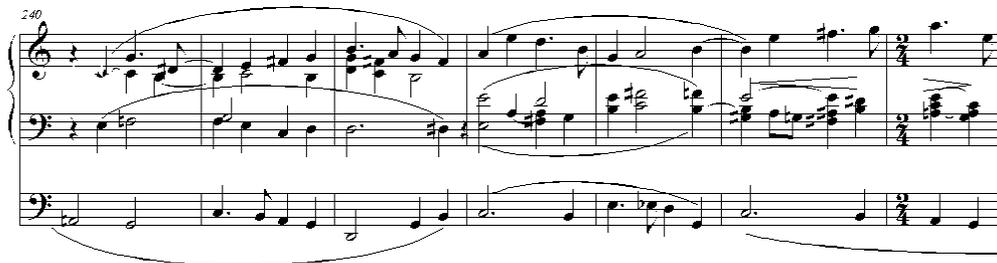


Figure 6. Julius Reubke, *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* mm. 248-254.



Figure 7. Julius Reubke, *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* mm. 317-321.

The psalm by which the organ sonata is inspired is also interesting to dissect. We find extra-musical meaning in many works of Romantic composers through a reflection of the text they use. The same is true in Reubke’s *Organ Sonata*, but through an implied, yet always absent text. According to Chorzempa, “by supplying the text of the 94th psalm to his organ sonata, Reubke revives a traditional organ composition practice of the Baroque era, but on terms of the Neo-German school.”⁴¹ He accomplished this modernization by intricately weaving his understanding of the text with the music he composed. In the

⁴¹ Chorzempa, *Julius Reubke, Life and Works*, 241.

Schuberth edition of the sonata, nine verses taken from the psalm are published⁴² and, although the three sections are loosely assigned verses (Figure 8), there is no strict indication of the meaning of various reoccurring themes in the music.

PSALM 94

(Grave, Larghetto)	Herr Gott, des die Rache ist, erscheine. Erhebe Dich, Du Richter der Welt; vergilt den Hoffärtigen, was sie verdienen.	(Grave, Larghetto)	O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thy self. Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud.
(Allegro con fuoco)	Herr, wie lange sollen die Gottlosen prahlen? Witwen und Fremdlinge erwürgen sie und töten die Waisen und sagen: der Herr sieht es nicht und der Gott Jacobs achtet es nicht.	(Allegro con fuoco)	Lord, how long shall the wicked triumph? They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet they say: The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it
(Adagio)	Wo der Herr mir nicht hülfe, so läge meine Seele schier in der Stille. Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis in meinem Herzen, aber deine Tröstungen ergötzen meine Seele.	(Adagio)	Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul.
(Allegro)	Aber der Herr ist mein Hort und meine Zuversicht. Er wird ihnen Unrecht vergelten und sie um ihre Bosheit vertilgen.	(Allegro)	But the Lord is my defence; and my God is the rock of my refuge. And he shall bring upon them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness.

Figure 8. Excerpts from Psalm 94 (verses 1-3, 6-7, 17, 19, and 23) with corresponding musical sections as given in the Schuberth edition, reprinted in the Peters Edition with the English translation.

The psalm itself is from the biblical book of Psalms and is the middle chapter of a set of eleven that are thematically linked around prayer and praise in a point and counter point fashion. Psalm 94 is, more specifically, the last part of a trilogy of psalms that transitions to the last half of the larger set. It was originally written in Hebrew, perhaps by King David, in the third century B.C. It is an appeal to God as a ruler and judge to avenge his people who are persecuted. The psalm emphasizes God as being just and strong, bringing righteousness to holy people who are being unfairly persecuted. Despite the anguish conveyed, there is also a strong sense of confidence in God's steadfastness and ability to recompense the faithful. Verses 1-7 begin by pleading with God to punish evil doers who "pour out their arrogant words" on the oppressed.⁴³ The verses that follow warn

⁴² Julius Reubke, *Sonata in C Minor, for Organ, on the 94th Psalm* [Sonatas,] (New York: C.F. Peters Corp; 1958), 1.

⁴³ Psalm 94:4.

the wickedness of God's omniscience and impending wrath. The final verses deal with the hope that comes from trusting in God and express thankfulness for His blessings, before returning again to the idea of wrath against the proud. These verses use the first person and are more reflective, a moment that is represented in the music by becoming softer, and more melodic, guiding the listener into a place of reflection (Figure 5). The psalm's intense pleading and fiery condemnation make it ideal for inspiration of an emotionally charged sonata.

From this text, we can begin to ascertain extra-musical meaning from Reubke's sonata. In interpreting the *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm*, it is important to keep in mind that any modern interpretation comes with bias inherent to this sort of analysis. Edward Lippman, a musicologist specializing in studies of programmatic music, observes "what is symbolic for the composer may not be so for the audience or the performer, and the historian also finds his own kinds of symbolism in music."⁴⁴ The history of programmatic music is rooted in imitation, recreating sounds like rain and birds. In the case of the organ, there has also been imitation of other instruments. But as Grace points out, "the most successful programme works are usually those in which the pictorial effects are general rather than particular."⁴⁵ It is much more difficult, however, to represent concepts that do not make their own sound. For this sort of meaning to be conveyed, conventions become very important because, as Lippman notes, "symbolism based on prior association is an extrinsic affair, unconcerned with any kind of likeness."⁴⁶ Because music works in a medium of sound, when it is unable to rely on imitation it must employ "relatively indirect means in representing non-audible things. It becomes an analogue or an allegory of the

⁴⁴ Lippman, *Symbolism in Music*, 554.

⁴⁵ Grace, *Church and Organ Music. Programme Music for the Organ (Concluded)*, 353.

⁴⁶ Lippman, *Symbolism in Music*, 570.

event represented.”⁴⁷ This method of representation can become cumbersome, however, because a great amount of sensitivity is required to discern which musical gestures are symbolic and which are simply artistic musical elements.

Trends today tend to downplay the importance of a program, even condemning it as distracting to the pure musical experience. Rather than becoming caught up in extra-musical meaning, musicologist Peter Kivy feels that it is “so much more important to get a handle on the ‘pure’ musical experience: music unadorned by text, title, program, or other ‘extra-musical paraphernalia.’”⁴⁸ Psychologist Wellek agrees, berating programmatic music in his essay “*The Relationship Between Music and Poetry*.” He says of programs, “one could consider it a failing if a piece of pure music needs such crutches for full understanding.”⁴⁹ Although Wellek does not have an extensive background in musical analysis, his sentiments are often shared by scholars and music enthusiasts. In my mind, however, a good program, one which is not hackneyed or heavy handed, can beautifully express corners of the human soul to which words have difficulty reaching. Therefore, program is not inherently bad and in fact can add to the piece by highlighting its strength of expression and giving the piece several dramatic levels with which to work. The aesthetics of the ‘pure music’ can still be enjoyed while being viewed in the context of a program.

In his programmatic work, Reubke uses pitch, rhythm, and many other musical elements to elicit the emotional impact of the verses in Psalm 94, without explicitly using the text in vocal music. Although, it is unknown how Reubke chose this text or how he interpreted the text himself, common programmatic practices of the time, in addition to current studies of meaning in music, give insight into his intentions. For example, certain

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 559.

⁴⁸ Peter Kivy, "It's Only Music: So what's to Understand?" *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 20, no. 4, 20th Anniversary Issue (Winter, 1986), 74.

⁴⁹ Albert Wellek, "The Relationship between Music and Poetry," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 21, no. 2 (Winter, 1962), 152.

musical gestures carry well defined symbolism of which Reubke would have been aware. These “extroversive signs” in music are developed through years of programmatic incorporation into compositions and, as Lippman mentions, “many of the motifs of this symbolism remain unchanged for centuries.”⁵⁰ The great majority of the symbols used in the past are still emotionally relevant today.

Several such extroversive signs appear in *The 94th Psalm*, giving listeners a guide to Reubke’s interpretation of the text. According to Chorzewpa, descending lines, such as the one found in the opening theme, for example, often signify “anguish and inner pain”⁵¹ and I feel both are applicable here. He also suggests the descending line reflects the inevitable descent of the wicked into hell. In this manner, I feel the beginning of the psalm expresses a cry of desperation for justice and vengeance against the wicked. The psalm’s strong words of anger are reflected in the descending chromatic line of the opening motive. Much later, the motive returns in the fugato in the allegro section (Figure 7), but the minor seconds are ascending to better represent the hopeful mood. As Lippman points out “high and low pitch can represent not only physical position and visually perceptible ascent and descent, but also abstract conceptions... such as God and angel, and hell and death.”⁵² The theme is more reflective of the security expressed in the words “my God is the rock of my refuge”⁵³ and the joy of the coming vindication is expressed through the fugato’s virtuosity.

This main motive is very important to the piece because it is expressed so often and in so many different forms and keys. Chorzewpa suggests that the opening Bb pedal point reflects the “eternity and constancy of God.” This makes sense based on historical uses of sustained notes, where according to Lippman, “a prolonged tone or chord will represent a

⁵⁰ Lippman, *Symbolism in Music*, 565.

⁵¹ Chorzewpa, *Julius Reubke, Life and Works*, 255.

⁵² Lippman, *Symbolism in Music*, 161.

⁵³ Psalm 94:22.

stationary object or a changeless state.”⁵⁴ But the concept of an eternal God is not directly dealt with in the psalm, so I do not believe it was Reubke’s intention to express this sentiment. That is not to say he restricted himself to characterizing only the aspects of God mentioned in the psalm, but I find it less likely that he would highlight this characterization without it being a focus of the psalm.

In his reflection on the opening motive, Chorzewpa also makes a connection with the leaps of contrary motion and the crucifixion.⁵⁵ He references similar practices in the Baroque era in which descending lines would be broken with small ascending leaps to signify bearing the cross or burdens, thus in the context of a psalm bringing a Christian context into the Old Testament concepts. Despite the extroversive precedence set by Bach and the philosophically satisfying effect it would have, I feel this is not a correlation that should be made. The idea that the alternation of direction of musical line represents crossing patterns seems, in my mind, to be a stretch.

The tritone leap is emblematic of suffering and pain and is often referred to as the “diabolus in musica,” or devil’s chord. This reference correlates to the images of decent into hell mentioned above. Though I disagree with Chorzewpa’s assessment of the first two measures, I do agree with his idea that the ascending gesture that follows the opening motive (Figure 9) seems to indicate the supplication of the text as the faithful turn their thoughts to heaven. I am not sure where the idea began that faster sound waves are representative of increased altitude, but nonetheless, this is the image that has been handed down through the generations. This idea of ascent agrees with the text of the psalm, which says “lift up thyself.” But when this opening motive repeats, Reubke sets it a half step

⁵⁴ Lippman, *Symbolism in Music*, 161.

⁵⁵ Chorzewpa, *Julius Reubke, Life and Works*, 255.

lower to “to increase the feeling of uneasiness.”⁵⁶ I feel this is an extremely effective gesture that fits with the motif established by the descending chromatic line in measures three and four.



Figure 9. Julius Reubke, *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* mm. 13-15.

Following the second statement of the ascending gesture are the motives in measures 16 and 17 shown above in Figure 2. I feel this phrase also affirms the text “lift up thyself,” or as it is translated in other versions, “Arise!” The strong rhythms suggest not only a pleading that God may appear, but almost a demand that he do so. This supplication is followed shortly by distinctive quarter notes that fall on the beat, contrasting with the syncopation of the main theme. I feel this gesture represents the punishment for the wicked that the victims of oppression desire (Figure 10). The “arise” gesture then returns again in full force in m. 29 (Figure 11). Chorzewpa views what follows as the “inner eruption and breaking forth from inner tension,” as represented by the triplet runs in the pedal under the main theme (Figure 12).⁵⁷ These moments of release are scattered through the piece deceptively offering solace, followed by the main motive reminding the listener of the impending judgment. Measure 286 offers a vivid example of this ruse (Figure 13). The melodic line slows to a peaceful E-major chord under a fermata, but then the opening

⁵⁶ Gailit, *Julius Reubke and His Organ Sonata: The 94th Psalm, Part 2*, 11.

⁵⁷ Chorzewpa, *Julius Reubke, Life and Works*, 255.

motive returns, soft but menacing.⁵⁸ When the “arise” figure returns once again in m. 375, it brings with it the sounds of victory in major triads (Figure 14). This is a point of arrival at which the Lord’s victory is beginning to be realized. This is not to say that the turmoil is over, and in fact the anguish will further examined and developed later. But here at least we catch a glimpse of the promise of future happiness.



Figure 10. Julius Reubke, *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* mm. 22-23.



Figure 11. Julius Reubke, *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* mm. 29-32.

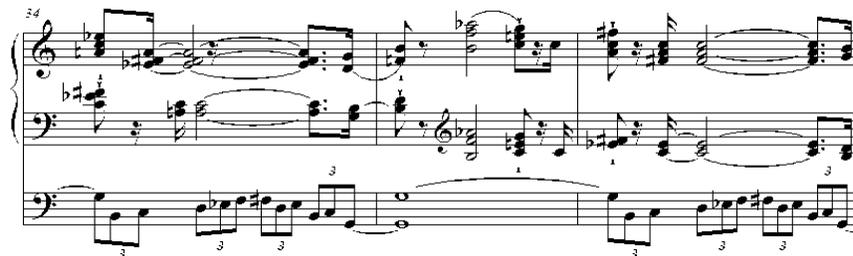


Figure 12. Julius Reubke, *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* mm. 34-36.

⁵⁸ Marquis, Gene. Personal conversation. April 18, 2007.

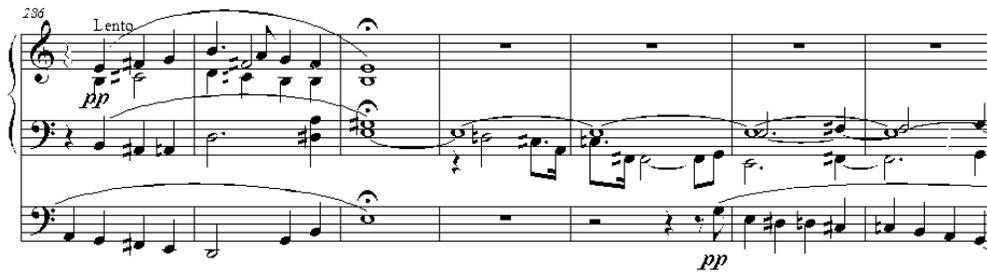


Figure 13. Julius Reubke, *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* mm. 286-292.



Figure 14. Julius Reubke, *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* mm. 375-376.

The fugato itself has multiple levels of representation. Its form is freer than traditional fugues, which does not necessarily indicate poor compositional technique on Reubke's part. According to Chorzewpa, "the programmatic meaning demands a freer treatment."⁵⁹ The fugato enters in a dramatic moment during which the turmoil of the oppressed is culminating. As Lippman notices, there is "intentional formlessness—aimless voice-leading or deliberately incorrect writing—has served as a symbol of confusion or chaos."⁶⁰ Reubke often leaves passages open, allowing himself room for further expansion and development with only rare moments of finality.⁶¹ Yet all the while, the fugato form remains, reminding us that "canonic structure has often symbolized adherence to rule or plan."⁶² I believe this juxtaposition reflects the psalmist's fear of persecution, yet ultimate trust in God's will.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Lippman, *Symbolism in Music*, 560.

⁶¹ Chorzewpa, *Julius Reubke, Life and Works*, 214.

⁶² Lippman, *Symbolism in Music*, 560.

The true moment of ultimate triumph might not actually come in the piece until the final return of the ascending minor second theme, this time decorated by ascending triplet triads (Figure 15). The mighty hand of God, protecting His people against His foes, is given its final majestic representation in the Allegro Assai. Here, the “arise” theme is combined with the “breaking forth” moving triplets mentioned by Chorzewpa to convey a sense of grandeur and awe at God’s victory (Figure 16). This gesture is followed by the final long decent into hell for the wicked (Figure 17) that eventually ends the piece on a c-minor chord. In this way, the thematic ideas of the first few measures are carried throughout the piece and create the framework for the full expression of the psalm.



Figure 15. Julius Reubke, *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* mm. 482-485.



Figure 16. Julius Reubke, *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* mm. 504-507.



Figure 17. Julius Reubke, *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* mm. 512-516.

These ideas of meaning that are conveyed through the opening motive are reinforced every time the theme reappears, which is quite often, making the ideas of suffering and supplication prominent throughout the piece. Even when there is a brief moment of reprieve in the second movement, the return to the original theme reemphasizes the anguish of the piece. Each time the theme appears in developments, recapitulations or in the final fugue these concepts are reemphasized to the listener.

Other scholars have tackled the meaning of the sonata's opening motives. Gailit asserts that the melodic line of the motive is well suited for the psalm in that the rhythms match the German syntax. He imagines the first syllable of "*Rache*" (revenge) being sung beginning on the first note of the tritone leap in Figure 1.⁶³ This would make programmatic sense, but I have to disagree with the idea that the syllables line up. In fact, I find it quite awkward to sing the line on the German text because unstressed syllables constantly land on the down beat. This problem is solved by ignoring the first word of the psalm, "*herr*," a title of respect, and beginning instead on the word "*Gott*" (God). Perhaps this is what Gailit had in mind because with this adjustment, the text fits rather well, at least in the first two measures where the rhythm is distinctive. All of these interpretations are valid to some extent, however, because nothing of Reubke's thoughts on the matter is left in writing to offer affirmation or contradiction.

Because the opening motive is reused in various permutations throughout the piece, it becomes integral to the *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm's* interpretation and expression of meaning. Reubke used this theme to express supplication, anger and remorse. He took his cues from programmatic writers of his time and from the past, blending their techniques to form an expressive work all his own. The impact of tone poets, like his teacher Liszt are

⁶³ Gailit, *Julius Reubke and His Organ Sonata: The 94th Psalm, Part 2*, 11.

evident, but “Liszt’s influence does not detract from its merit.”⁶⁴ Reubke instead used what he learned to find his own unique voice in organ composition. Quoted in Chorzempa’s dissertation, the *Handbuch der Orgelliteratur*, a Romantic-era publication on organ music, lauds Reubke for having “introduced a new kind of orchestral treatment of the organ.”⁶⁵ It goes on to say that the sonata was “magnificently planned, yet in many parts more suitable for the orchestra than for organ.” This type of organ writing was extremely advanced for Reubke, both due to the young age at which he was writing and also in relation to the musical trends of his time. Since then, his sonata, although still underappreciated, has become a more prominent part of the virtuosic organ performance cannon. Since World War II, its popularity in concert settings outside of churches has also increased and, according to Chorzempa, “its enjoyment of the high esteem of non-organists is virtually unique for a work of 19th century organ literature”⁶⁶

It is tantalizing to imagine the compositional potential that Reubke possessed. Had he lived a full life, surely he would have been well known among the great names of Romantic composers. As other composers, like Wagner, pushed the borders of tonality, Reubke’s own innovative character would surely have contributed. Perhaps he would have added to organ repertoire inspired by scriptural texts. Grace asserts “as a result of modern developments in the instrument it seems likely that organ-music of the future will become increasingly descriptive”⁶⁷ and such music would in large part owe its origins to Reubke’s influence and precedent.

⁶⁴ Grace, *Church and Organ Music. Programme Music for the Organ (Concluded)*, 354.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 275.

⁶⁷ Grace, *Church and Organ Music. Programme Music for the Organ (Concluded)*, 354.

In the face of death, Reubke seemed to have little fear of the critics' reactions to his forward-thinking compositional techniques. His solitary nature allowed him his own personal belief systems and as he once mentioned to Pohl:

“No one can touch or rob me of my artistic belief, but I feel no necessity to speak out against someone or even to defend myself against the attacks of an opponent. For what purpose? We will convince them as little as they will conquer us! I am active as a composer and virtuoso in the spirit of our movement as much as I can be; but I only wish to speak through my music. Others may make commentary on it. The most important thing is that one creates works which have no need to be shy of any attacks or tests.”⁶⁸

This is one of the rare examples we have of Reubke's written thoughts on his own work and I feel he truly succeeds in his endeavors. His wish to speak is fulfilled through his poignant musical expression. Most importantly, Reubke achieves the final goal he mentions above. The *Organ Sonata on the 94th Psalm* is unabashed in its assertions and technique, which allows it to stand strong in the face of any criticism in Reubke's absence.

⁶⁸ Chorzempa, *Julius Reubke, Life and Works*, 126.

Bibliography

- Chorzempa, Daniel. *Julius Reubke, Life and Works*, 1971.
- Gailit, Michael. "Julius Reubke and His Organ Sonata, the 94th Psalm, Part 1." *The Diapason* 83, no. 1 (1992/01/00/January; January, 1992; 1992): 12-14.
- . "Julius Reubke and His Organ Sonata: The 94th Psalm, Part 2." *The Diapason* 83, no. 2 (1992/02/00/February; February, 1992; 1992): 10-11.
- Grace, Harvey. "Church and Organ Music. Programme Music for the Organ (Concluded)." *The Musical Times* 59, no. 906 (Aug. 1, 1918): 352-356, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0027-4666%2819180801%2959%3A906%3C352%3ACAOMPM%3E2.0.CO%3B2-9>.
- . "Church and Organ Music. Programme Music for the Organ (Continued)." *The Musical Times* 59, no. 905 (Jul. 1, 1918): 303-306, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0027-4666%2819180701%2959%3A905%3C303%3ACAOMPM%3E2.0.CO%3B2>
- R.Kivy, Peter. "It's Only Music: So what's to Understand?" *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 20, no. 4, 20th Anniversary Issue (Winter, 1986): 71-74, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0021-8510%28198624%2920%3A4%3C71%3AIOMSWT%3E2.0.CO%3B2-0>.
- Lippman, Edward Arthur. "Symbolism in Music." *The Musical Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (Oct., 1953): 554-575, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0027-4631%28195310%2939%3A4%3C554%3ASIM%3E2.0.CO%3B2-5>.
- Marquis, Gene. Personal conversation. April 18, 2007.
- Reubke, Julius. *The Complete Organ Works*. Romantic Organ Literature Series., edited by Wayne Leupold. Vol. 6. Melville, N.Y.: McAfee Music Corp., 1978.
- Reubke, Julius. *Sonata in c Minor, for Organ, on the 94th Psalm*. Edition Peters, no.4941. [Sonatas,]. New York: C.F. Peters Corp, 1958.
- Wellek, Albert. "The Relationship between Music and Poetry." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 21, no. 2 (Winter, 1962): 149-156, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0021-8529%28196224%2921%3A2%3C149%3ATRBMAP%3E2.0.CO%3B2-U>.
- Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTENATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.